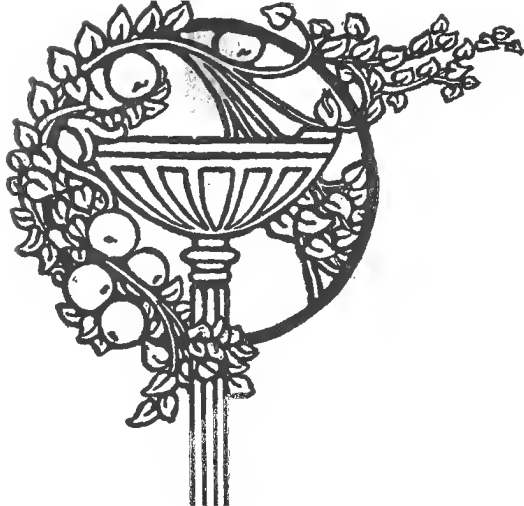


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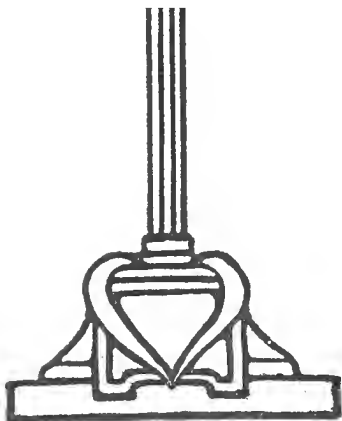
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By **THE SAME AUTHOR**

Friendship ♪ ♪ ♪

Work ♪ ♪ ♪

Culture and Restraint

Listening to God ♪

Christ's Service of Love

The Gift of Influence



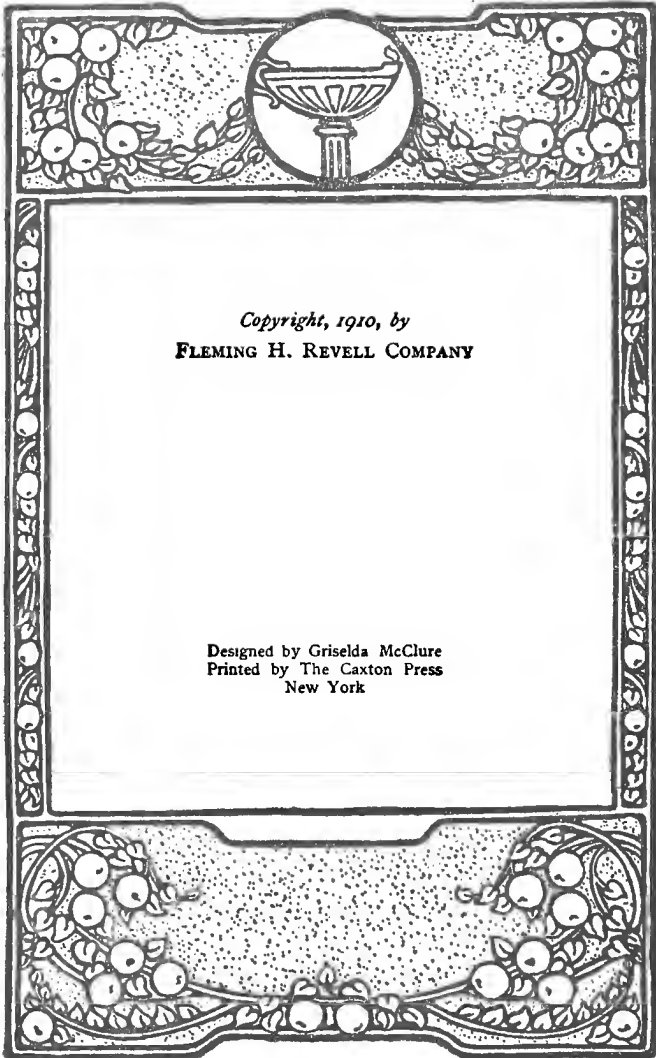
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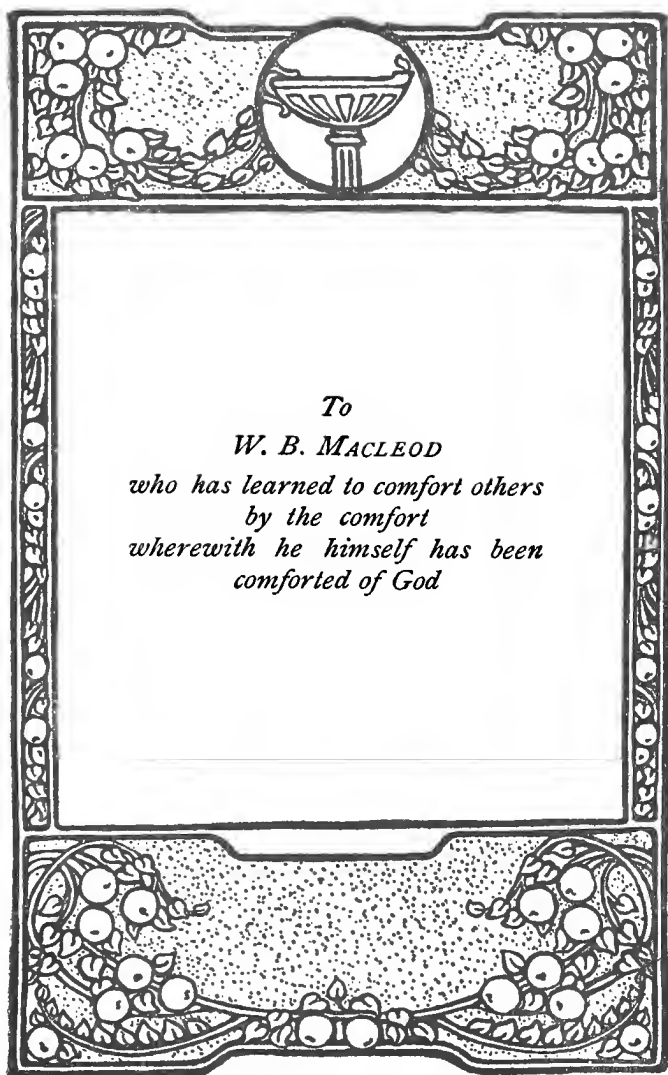
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To

W. B. MACLEOD

*who has learned to comfort others
by the comfort
wherewith he himself has been
comforted of God*

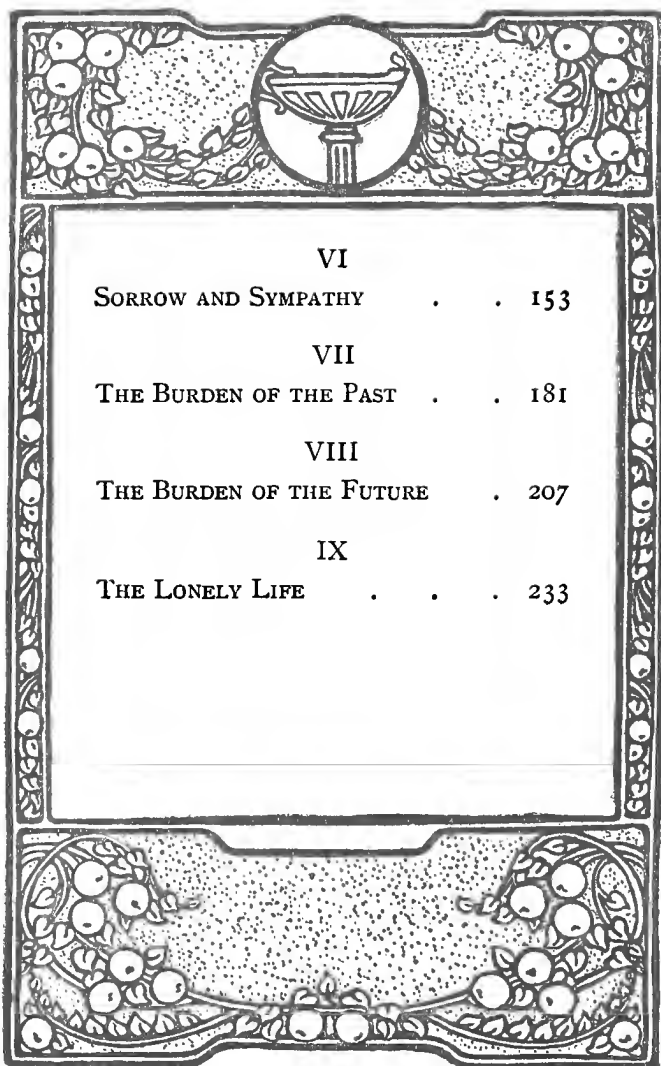


And let the base of Heaven's deep organ blow.
—MILTON.



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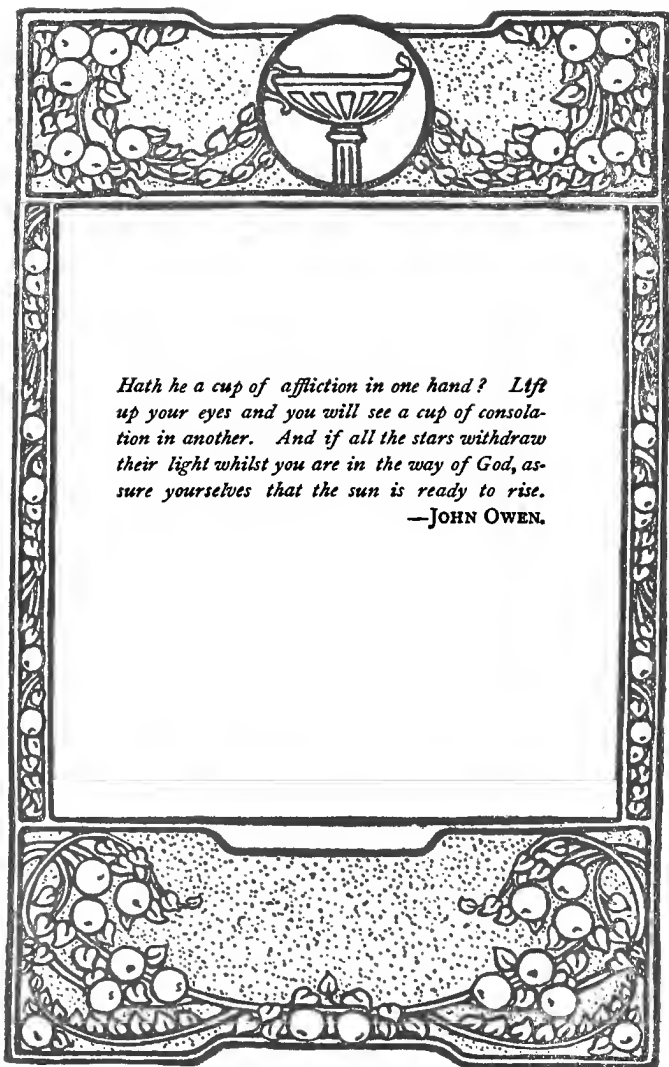
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Hath he a cup of affliction in one hand? Lift up your eyes and you will see a cup of consolation in another. And if all the stars withdraw their light whilst you are in the way of God, assure yourselves that the sun is ready to rise.

—JOHN OWEN.



The Gospel of Comfort

THE world is full of men and women who are carrying burdens of work or care or sorrow, and the burden often seems too heavy for the bearer. The sorest part of the trouble is that it appears meaningless, with no evident relation to life. The result is that there is only a dull bending of the neck for the load, or a listless doing of the duty. Should the burden seem inevitable, it would be something if we could see some useful purpose in it. The apparent aimlessness of pain is more disabling than the pain itself. Life loses its spring and the world turns to drab, when the eye has no larger vision.

The greatest need of men is a message of good cheer, of heartening for the daily task. But this cannot come by mere well-wishing and the usual surface consolations,



The Gospel of Comfort

“patching grief with proverbs.” It can only be by seeing that the whole of life is reasonable and can be made to show some meaning. For great living, we need to believe in the worth of life. In the face of the almost appalling difficulties that confront faith, we are nevertheless driven to meet them to keep life sane. At the same time we can hold this central faith of the worth of life, without having a rounded theory to explain the universe. It is enough that we see cause to take heart of grace and to be strong and of good courage.

So, the purpose of this book is not to give a speculative solution of the deep problem of pain, but to show the practical ways by which a brave soul can gather courage and strength and comfort. It is to note the fruits which the tree of life can be made to bear. There is a way to peace of heart and comfort of mind and composure of soul. This is the Gospel of Comfort, needed not merely for the sorrow-



The Gospel of Comfort

ing, but for all who bend to the yoke of human life. Charles Reade begins his great novel *The Cloister and the Hearth* with the remark that not a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Fortunately for the world this is true, though most are moved by a deep instinct rather than by a rational purpose. When the instinct fails, it needs to be reinforced by a purpose, and the one effective dynamic must come from the region of faith. Our present purpose is the practical one of relating that faith to the needs of life.

We are all of course affected by our time and by the prevalent mood of our age. There have been periods when it was easy to be an extreme optimist, when indeed it was difficult to be anything else. In our own age pessimism is more than an affectation. A sombre view of the world is natural to-day when men have been flooded



The Gospel of Comfort

with more knowledge than they have been able to absorb, and when they are confused about moral issues, and when much of the traditional faith has been questioned. Sometimes this sombre view appears as a cynical depreciation of man, who has puffed up his little heart with vain imaginings as to his place in the universe. Sometimes it appears as a blind rage at the inequalities and wrongs of society, at the cruelties of history, at the dark mystery of human life. "Truly God is good," said the Psalmist, but men are not so sure of it to-day.

Before we can make up our mind about the worth of life we must decide what our standard of judgment should be. Are we going to make our values by counting up the pleasures and subtracting the pains? Or are we to decide by ethical standards? Might it not be possible that moral interests may justify much that otherwise would be inexplicable? If it were entirely a question of happiness and pleasurable sensation



The Gospel of Comfort

it would be a matter of arithmetic, but even then nothing would be settled about the worth of life, since man is more than a bundle of sensations. There is a point of view from which the existence of evil is justified, even if it is not explained. It may be that what we call evil is a condition necessary to the fulfillment of human life. A cosmic process is not to be judged by man's wishes but by the end, and if we decide that growth is worth while, and if we see that obstruction and much that we call evil are conditions of growth, we will at least learn patience and be content to exercise faith.

Of all the problems associated with the existence of evil, the problem of pain has become the most poignant. The modern world is perhaps not so sensitive to sin as men used to be, but it is much more sensitive to pain. There is a revolt against the conditions of human life. Sometimes it appears as a stony despair, or a wild de-



The Gospel of Comfort

fiance. To speak of God as good or as loving creates rage in hearts that see no meaning in the tragic round of events. Sometimes it appears in the mood of a jaunty indifference, or in the selfishness of one who tries not to care. Again, it is seen in the despair which gives up hope of any light on the dark subject.

In many cases there is a willful shutting of the eyes to facts, and the preaching of a shallow optimism. If we wink hard enough and fast enough, we can make believe that there is no ugly side to life and no abyss at the world's end. It is assumed in some pretentious faiths that if we assert loudly that there is no pain there will be none; if we deny with sufficient assurance that sin and sorrow exist they cease to be. It is all so futile and such a petty shift; for even if by that means we could save ourselves from any personal experience of the mystery of evil, we need only look back over history to be con-



The Gospel of Comfort

vinced that the whole creation has groaned and travailed together in pain until now. We see blood-stains on the flinty track of the steep ascent where human feet have trod. And we need only look around us to see lives that seem made to dishonour, and to see many modern illustrations of the ancient problem that often the good suffer, with a suffering from which the wicked are exempt. Our little human life is enisled amidst a trackless ocean of unrest. There is moaning at the bar as the sea beats and breaks upon the shores of life.

The world is a place of need, and of all the needs of the needy world the greatest is that human hearts should find comfort. The word to comfort means more than to soothe and console. It means originally to strengthen, to *fortify*, to bring support and courage; and naturally enough it has been narrowed down to the special mean-



The Gospel of Comfort

ing to bring solace and good cheer, to soothe some one in grief and trouble. We see the wide range of meaning in the word when we think that comfort is often used for the satisfaction of bodily needs, freedom from care and trouble, a state of physical well-being, as in our common phrase "creature comforts." The true significance of the word is to get something which will give strength to endure under trial and to enable men to carry on the work of life with faith and courage. It is in this large and virile sense of the word that it is used as the title of this book, and not merely as consolation for those who mourn.

At the same time the profoundest needs of life are focussed for us in some such dire strait as bereavement suggests, and a man may be said not to know life, if he has never faced death for himself or for one he loves. But our needs are not limited to these times of grand crisis, but



The Gospel of Comfort

meet us at every turn. It is impossible to classify all the cares and troubles and necessities. They are past counting, and even the same sorrow creates different problems to different hearts. What is to enable us to meet the terrible uncertainties of life and its more terrible certainties, to master doubt and disarm fear, to carry burdens patiently and face death calmly? By what can we reach and maintain the equilibrium of life? What can give the victory over sorrow and pain, and is any victory possible? The one unfailing source of comfort in the Bible is God Himself, faith in His love and grace. Only He can comfort hearts and stablish them. Indeed, the ultimate *religious* meaning of all trial is that through it men may be led or drawn to God, and may learn His statutes and find peace under His shadow.

We cannot read the New Testament intelligently, without being impressed that



The Gospel of Comfort

a new sense of power and a new source of comfort came to men who had learned to know God through Jesus Christ. The contrast is most marked when we know the world into which the new message came, and this we can do to-day as never before. The epitaphs and papyri, which are being discovered in such numbers in Egypt and elsewhere, tell us of the customs of the common people, and show us the common point of view in the time of early Christianity before it had laid hold of the world. We see the mass of the people hungering for religion, and with nothing substantial to satisfy the hunger, and on that account open to all manner of superstition. We see them in their helplessness before the inevitable distress of death and before the great problem of life, usually either with a hopeless resignation, or with a forced gaiety that is more pathetic still.

One of these witnesses to a past life is



The Gospel of Comfort

suggestive as indicating the comfortless state of the world. In Yale University Library there has been deposited a Greek Papyrus of the second century, which is a letter of comfort sent over a bereavement. It reads thus, "Eirene to Taonnophris and Philon good cheer! I was as much grieved and shed as many tears over Eumoiros as I shed for Didymus, and I did everything that was fitting, and so did my whole family. But still there is nothing one can do in the face of such trouble. So I leave you to comfort yourselves. Good-bye." It is quite evidently not meant to be heartless, but there was not anything more to be said before the final passion of life. Paul's word is thrown into bold relief when he wrote to his converts "that ye sorrow not, *even as the rest*, which have no hope."

When we say that the religious meaning of trial is that men should find peace in God, we cannot forget, however, that



The Gospel of Comfort

the very existence of human misery often leads men to the denial of God altogether. To them it seems like reasoning in a circle to justify pain by the existence of God, and then to justify God by finding meaning in pain. The great tragedy of the world has often brought to men the shipwreck of faith, and this is the greatest tragedy of all. How can God be possible and permit in His world the horrors we know, the deadly pestilence, the fierce tornado, the solid earth rent by earthquakes, the peaceful town buried by the volcano's molten lava, the desolation of war? This tragedy on the large scale has destroyed faith which could withstand even personal sorrow. Others again only realize that the problem exists when it strikes home to their own hearts. Only their own sore experience, their own anguish and pain, bring them to despair of God. With others, faith can survive both the thought of the world's tragedy in the mass



The Gospel of Comfort

and even personal misfortune, but it breaks down when they have to stand helpless before the suffering of those bound to them by all the ties of love.

Sooner or later we have all to make the great essay. Sooner or later it comes to all of us in one or other of its forms—the weight of the mystery of pain. Into each life the scarlet thread is woven. We have to be very dull of heart indeed and blind of eye, if we are never touched by the infinite pathos of human life. To be convinced of it we do not need to wait for lurid pictures of the devastation of cities and countries. Life is steeped in sorrow. All must be impressed some time with a sense of the weakness of human power and the pettiness of human life, as in the old prayer of the Breton fisherfolk, “O God, protect us; for our boat is little and the sea is great.” Pain and failure and grief and loss are all around us, if not within us, and the sorest plight on earth



The Gospel of Comfort

is to know the bitter problem without knowing the source of any real comfort, to know the burden and know nothing of a burden-bearer. We cannot walk the streets without seeing the stricken look on many a face and read a story in many eyes, the telltale windows of the soul.

Mr. Joseph Hatton recalled recently a pathetic incident that occurred to himself and William Black, the novelist. As they were about to sail for Liverpool from New York, a man rushed hurriedly on board with a basket of flowers in his hand and came up to William Black and said, "On my last voyage here I lost a little girl, and she was buried at sea in such and such a latitude. Now, sir, will you scatter these flowers upon the waves when you pass over that latitude?" Of course he willingly promised to do this. Very early, when it was still dark, long before any one had risen, the two stole up on deck, and there, beneath the morning



The Gospel of Comfort

stars, they cast the father's flowers upon the daughter's vast and wandering grave. To all must come some time the breaking of the strongest ties, and all sometimes must be moved with pity for the pathos of life and with a sense of the vanity of all earthly pursuits. The world is made barer and poorer when we feel that all loving interest in us and our doings and fortunes has gone out of life. "What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!"

In such a mood we can ask if it is worth while being renewed in courage for the tasks of each day, and if any comfort could bring back again the old zest for life. What can brace us again for the conflict and make us calmly accept duty and destiny? What can dignify life and make it appear inherently great? For, often the trial is simply the smallness and monotony of our daily interests, the disheartening uniformity, the petty pace at which life



The Gospel of Comfort

creeps from day to day. Sometimes small disappointments are harder even than a great sorrow; the pin-pricks of circumstances can goad some to madness who could bear with fortitude and dignity a great wound. Petty annoyances and little discomforts are often harder to bear than a heavy affliction. It is a common experience to find that, to some, small vexations are more trying than great ones. A great sorrow will often be accepted in a great mood, whereas patience is exhausted and the nerves worn bare by exasperating trials and little disappointments. The quarrel that many have with life is that it does not offer enough scope, and does not measure up to reasonable expectations. Many people suffer the pain of maladjustment rather than any severe agony. They feel they have not the right environment. It is not so much a revolt against life as a revolt against their lot.

Every sympathetic observer must be



The Gospel of Comfort

struck with the patience of the multitude, the silent endurance of the mass of men, but underneath is often a sense of wrong. Many wonder if it is worth going through with the prosaic duties, petty self-denials, obscure privations, and constant drudgery. It is not the fact of struggle, but that the struggle should be on such a slight field and for such slight things—merely for daily bread or in a work which is uncongenial. There is often something squalid even in the kind of trial. It is not that there should be a demand for self-denial, but that it should be so petty. A great sacrifice could be made with a glorious joy, but life has never offered even that satisfaction. There is never other than the same fretting cares, and the same grinding routine, and the same colourless lot. The years bring to most a perpetual disappointment of hope.

Life has little to teach us if we are not



The Gospel of Comfort

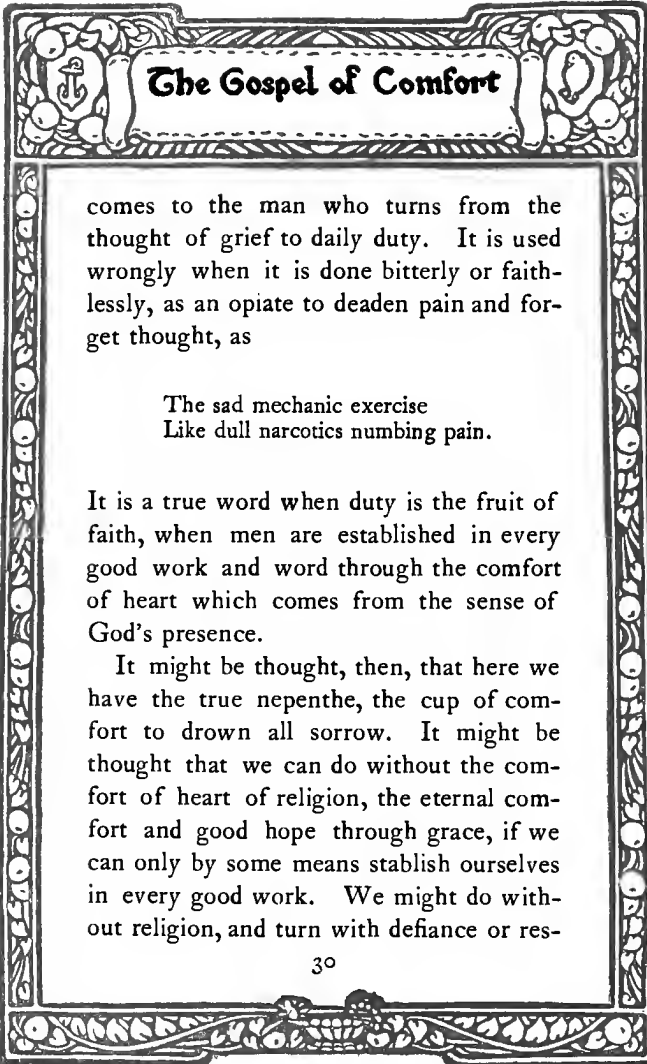
willing to learn the meaning of our limitations. If our standard of values is a moral one, we must revise our judgment of what is great and what small. We will see that these petty trials and tantalizing privations may be made occasions for growth in grace and in gracious life. They become part of the divine appointment of our life. These experiences may be to us not only means of God's education for us, but even sacraments of His love. That is at least the religious answer, that there may be a blessing even in the dreary day, and some fruit to be gathered from the most untoward experience. When we believe that we are in the will of God, a thing ceases to be merely hard luck and becomes a heroic occasion. A disappointment changes from a grief into a glory, when it is seen to be an appointment of God. It is a school of discipline and an altar of sacrifice. Everything depends on our essential view of life, and that in turn



The Gospel of Comfort

depends on our view of God. The Christian life is not a matter of great and small. It becomes consistent and all of a piece, when it is seen in the light of faith. And the Christian answer to all need or trial of whatever sort is simply this: "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish them in every good work and word."

The only dignified alternative to faith in God as the source of comfort is the stoical attitude. The world can sometimes meet suffering with defiance or resignation, can refuse to bend even though it must break, can speak of the unconquerable soul even in the keenest pain or the deepest grief. Of a piece with this is the common advice to bury sorrow in the presence of duty, and to brace oneself up for the stern realities of life. There is a great and blessed truth in this, that some comfort



The Gospel of Comfort

comes to the man who turns from the thought of grief to daily duty. It is used wrongly when it is done bitterly or faithlessly, as an opiate to deaden pain and forget thought, as

The sad mechanic exercise
Like dull narcotics numbing pain.

It is a true word when duty is the fruit of faith, when men are established in every good work and word through the comfort of heart which comes from the sense of God's presence.

It might be thought, then, that here we have the true nepenthe, the cup of comfort to drown all sorrow. It might be thought that we can do without the comfort of heart of religion, the eternal comfort and good hope through grace, if we can only by some means stablish ourselves in every good work. We might do without religion, and turn with defiance or res-



The Gospel of Comfort

ignation according to our temperament to what we know to be daily duty. The writer of Ecclesiastes came to this in one of his moods. Somewhat cynically he had been pursuing a train of thought suggested by death. He saw that without religious faith in a future life death levels man with the animal, however higher in faculty and intellect he may stand above the animal in life. Here at least, when they alike turn to dust, "a man has no preëminence over a beast." It is an argument of despair pointing to the futility of the high thoughts and high hopes of men, yet it is the only possible conclusion from such materialism as for the moment is contemplated by the writer. "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; as the one dieth, so dieth the other." The lesson to be drawn by a wise man is the lesson drawn ever from similar philosophy, that of a careful and prudent epicureanism with a stoic touch in it: "Wherefore I perceive



The Gospel of Comfort

that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his portion." He does not recommend a wild and reckless grasp at what sources of enjoyment are afforded by our short life. That defeats itself, only shortens the time, and fills it with ennui and disgust. The best way is to seek the calmer happiness got from the simpler sources of human life, and among them the enjoyment of healthy labour, not worrying too much with the malady of thought, but accepting the good of the common lot of man, finding some content and joy in his own works.

We do not need to examine the poverty of such a scheme of life, and the weakness of such a foundation, to show that materialism of creed in the long run means materialism of life, and that there is nothing to keep it from being of the grossest form. But accepting the undoubted truth that serious occupation is a source of happiness and of comfort, we may well ask if



The Gospel of Comfort

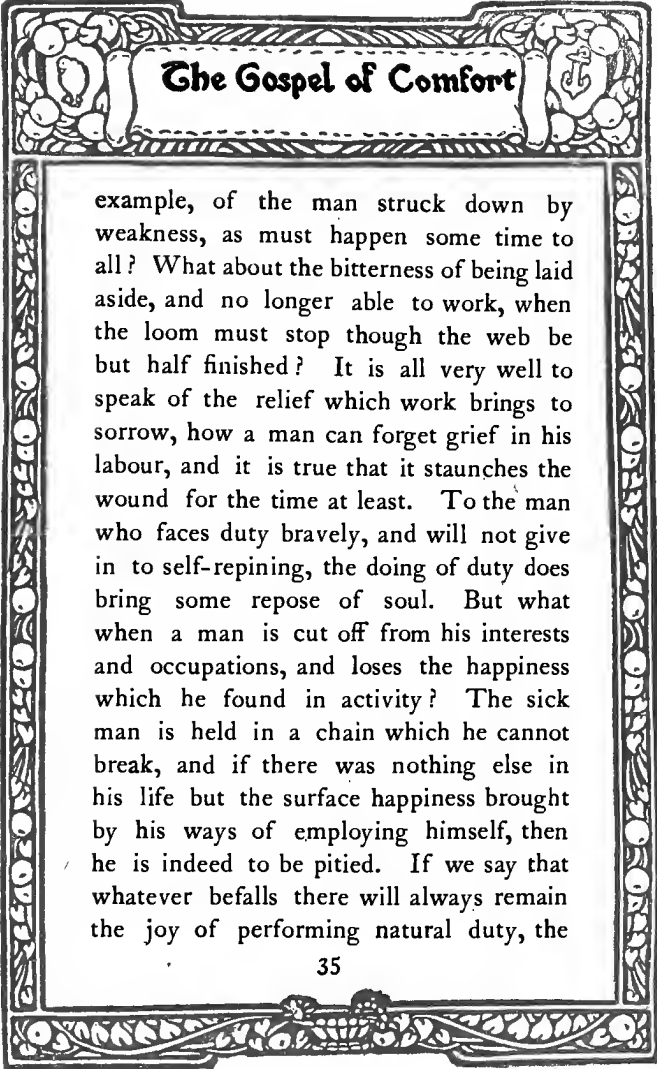
work itself can insure happiness and assuage grief. If so, it is strange that such a simple secret should be so often missed, and strange that even the workers themselves should seek to escape from it to what they imagine the better lot of idleness. The fact is that work itself does not bring happiness. Without it happiness is impossible, but alone it brings weariness and a sense of futility. The writer of Ecclesiastes himself again and again speaks of its vanity. "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" As a matter of fact no wise man can be satisfied with his own work, to say nothing of its satisfying his life. The man who looks complacently on what he does has a very meagre standard of excellence. Even if it satisfied his needs of outward activity, there remains the whole region of his inward life. If that be left, it is only a counsel of despair to recommend ceaseless industry to fill up the void. There will



The Gospel of Comfort

creep in the haunting doubt as to whether it is worth while going on merely as a machine. We need to feel that our work is worth doing, that it is accomplishing something, and that in following the line of duty we are also in line with something bigger. We need to have our activities related to the larger life of the world, and faith alone does this. It turns work into duty, giving it a secure motive. It relates our life to God, and makes us sure in simple trust that neither He nor the laws of our nature will play us false. The twin secrets of the source of happiness and peace are faith and duty—simple faith in God, in His love and justice, and simple duty whose motive is in that loving faith.

The weakness of thinking that we can find surcease of sorrow without finding any inward comfort is seen when we think of those who cannot work, or whose work is distasteful by temperament. What, for



The Gospel of Comfort

example, of the man struck down by weakness, as must happen some time to all? What about the bitterness of being laid aside, and no longer able to work, when the loom must stop though the web be but half finished? It is all very well to speak of the relief which work brings to sorrow, how a man can forget grief in his labour, and it is true that it staunches the wound for the time at least. To the man who faces duty bravely, and will not give in to self-repining, the doing of duty does bring some repose of soul. But what when a man is cut off from his interests and occupations, and loses the happiness which he found in activity? The sick man is held in a chain which he cannot break, and if there was nothing else in his life but the surface happiness brought by his ways of employing himself, then he is indeed to be pitied. If we say that whatever befalls there will always remain the joy of performing natural duty, the



The Gospel of Comfort

peace and content of doing something, and that should suffice, even that refuge will be taken from us. Somewhere on the road of life we will be met by some calamity or weakness, when we, too, will be stricken like the strongest. It may be early or late—early, as with Romanes, cut off in the midst of his busy scientific work, to review again the whole foundations of faith and life; or like Amiel, to whom the terror of the invalid life was that it meant an end of everything but waiting, and whose pitiful cry on his death-bed was, “I cannot work”—or it may be late, as with Carlyle, the last years of whose life were darkened by the loss of the power of writing, and to whom idleness was misery. Come it must and will, in some form or other, and we discover that our scheme of life has only been a makeshift, and that it turns to dust and ashes like other less worthy ends.

We are driven relentlessly back on God.



The Gospel of Comfort

As years go on, and the sadness of life comes home to us, we feel that we get comfort and strength nowhere else but in the reality of God and in a simple trust in Christ's "Hereafter." It is like a strong hand in the dark to believe that God our Father loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. That is the infallible way of finding comfort for our hearts and stablishing them in every good work and word. The only way to make peace secure, and to save our work from futility and our lives from vanity, is the way of faith. Without faith in God and God's love and God's future for us, there cannot be for us any true and permanent comfort. Without it, we are open at every turn to any shock of chance and to every alarm of fate. But with such faith we can lift up our burden with serenity, and perform our tasks with peace, and find joy in our work, looking upon it simply and sweetly as service. And if,

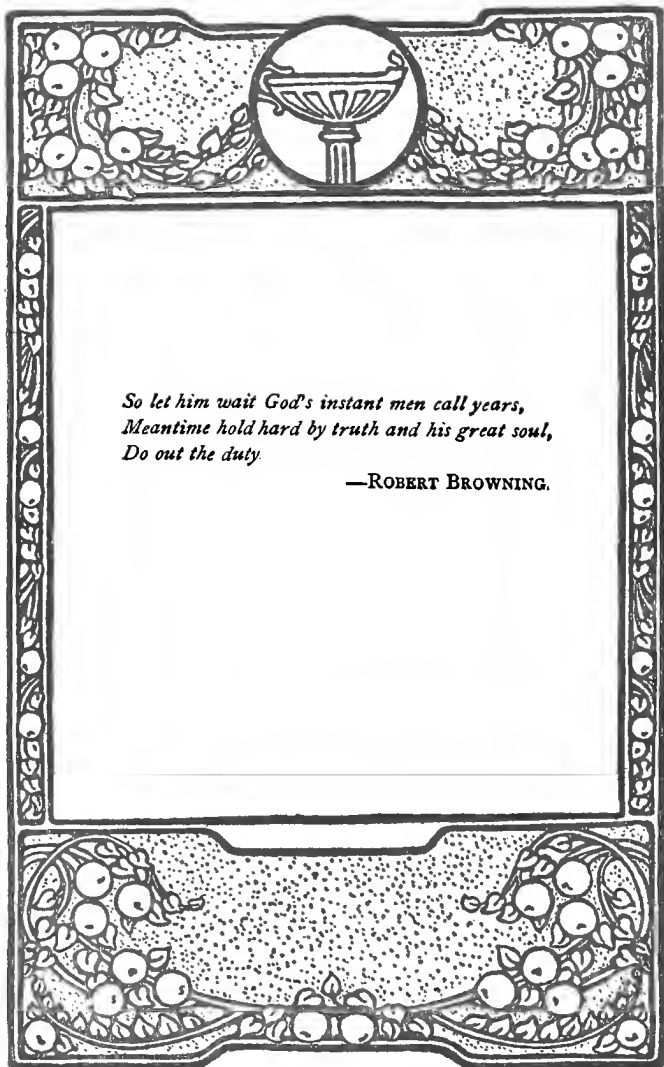


The Gospel of Comfort

and when, the very worst comes when all our activities are taken from us, we are not robbed of everything; nay, we are robbed of nothing; for our life is hid with Christ in God. True faith expands for every fresh need, and when the need comes the comfort comes also, and out of weakness men are made strong. When we are oppressed by the burden and overwhelmed by the spectacle of human misery, we must learn that there is a deeper thing than happiness, and that is peace; and eternal peace is only to be had in communion with the eternal God.



The After-Look



*So let him wait God's instant men call years,
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty.*

—ROBERT BROWNING.



The After-Look

THE first duty of man is not to find reasons but to find facts.

If we ever find a reason, it is an after-thought, the result of the after-look over the field of ascertained facts. The great thing is to learn, and submit to, the laws of life and the actual conditions under which we exist. Often there is a satisfaction of the heart, when there is no satisfaction of the reason. We live all the time in the presence of mystery—and yet we contrive to live. We are not always dealing with ultimate issues, but mostly are content to find a practical way out of our present difficulty, and to clear enough space in which to walk. Still, it is the part of candour and also of courage to acknowledge the actual situation, even when it involves mystery.



The After-Look

The fact of the world's evil is one that has always oppressed the human mind. It sometimes presses sorer on youth than on age, on youth with its warm eager sympathies, its keen sensibilities, its unregulated enthusiasm on behalf of the world. It certainly presses sorer on faith than on unfaith; for unbelief can give it up in despair or swallow its difficulty with some flippant theory, but faith has to reconcile its certain convictions of God with the facts of life.

It presses sorer in relation to the outward society, the world around us, than it does even in the individual life. If mine were the only sorrow, if mine were the only pain, the problem would not hang with such a dread weight. I can sometimes see glimmerings of a light through the darkness: I can sometimes understand some reason and mayhap unbare even a cause: I can sometimes feel the touch of a leading hand: and when I cannot see I



The After-Look

can trust, and where I can do neither I can bear. But to see a world in agony; to look back and trace the groaning and travailing through the years; to look around and mark sorrow in the droop of a head and hear pain in the tones of a voice; to know that our case is the world's case—that is the hugeness of the problem.

What is the meaning and is there any meaning? Is it that sin must not go unpunished, as the hard dogmatist explains it? If so, the avenger is surely blind that his unblunted darts should strike and shiver in such unexpected marks. Ignorance finds no mercy, and innocence no relieve. History records countless examples where the sin of one man was paid for by the blood of multitudes. We see the innocent suffer with and for the guilty: we see one man drag down many others in his ruin: we see blameless lives helping to pay out the price paid for the folly and sin of others: we see a nation brought to



The After-Look

shame by the ambition and selfishness of its rulers. There are inherited defects and miseries that cannot be justified by such a cut-and-dry explanation. Little children begin life with dreadful disability, infected by evil example if not with an evil taint of blood, and hampered by an evil environment.

Is it all a game of chance, a blind whirl of atoms, as the hard materialist sometimes explains it? That is to make life like a Parisian barricade in the days of the Revolution, with bombs shot in the air over the seething crowd, letting them strike whom and where they may. The normal civic life would cease in a perpetual state of siege, and the normal human life could hardly be expected to perform its functions in such a beleaguered condition. The world has never found comfort in this explanation, never even found forgetfulness there. There lies despair, and the heart of man rejects the

The After-Look

gospel of despair. Better a dread avenger than a dead force : better the creed of the religious dogmatist than that of the scientific dogmatist : better a blind faith than a callous fatalism : better a reign of terror than no reign at all!

The problem may be insoluble from the speculative point of view, yet it is one that a theistic explanation of the universe must meet fairly. If God be all that is claimed for Him, what about the almost intolerable suffering of the world? They are the old alternatives—from a surface view of the physical evil and the moral evil either God is not all-powerful, or He is not all-loving. To force this antithesis to a logical conclusion men have painted the evils in darkest colours, have shown nature “red in tooth and claw,” have enlarged on the misery of mankind, have described a world void of meaning and of purpose, seeing nothing in history but a track of blood, hearing nothing but a



The After-Look

shriek of pain. They tell us that they would not make a dog suffer what God makes man suffer. The argument is to drive us to blank infidelity.

Well, we are justified in carrying the war into the enemies' territory and asking what they propose for the desperate situation they depict. If it be all true and if there be to a candid mind nothing but suffering in the world, what do they suggest except a wild protest against life and a fierce denial of God? If I know pain, there is little mitigation of pain in merely hearing another curse. What aid can this negation of hope give us, what strength can this doctrine of despair bring us to help us carry our load? It is as true as ever that to be without God is to be without hope in the world. If there be nothing that we can call purpose in the universe and if that purpose be not loving, if there be no soul of good working in and through things evil, there can be no real comfort even possible. The only



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chance for us lies in something that will help us to believe in a reasonable universe, and that will help us to fall into line with it. We can at least welcome whatever gives us hope and courage in the desperate plight. Of course if a man is willing to go the length of acting on the complete conclusion of pessimism, which makes the extinction of mankind the solution, we at least escape the added problem of his prating.

There are some important things to say concerning this doleful picture of the world which pessimism paints. The first is that the picture is out of perspective. The impression of unmitigated evil and accumulated pain is produced by a selective process. It is not the ordinary world as we each know it, even at its worst. Nature is not all and only cruel and implacable, and grinding out results from causes, heedless of what is broken and torn. Nor is she



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all and only red in tooth and claw. There is a wonderfully healing ministry in nature, a magic by which she covers scars and medicates wounds. Even in the matter of human pleasures and pains, the picture is unfair and untrue. Most men trust their instinct which convinces them that life for them is good. In their sanest and healthiest moods they feel sure that it was worth living. Most men will admit, even in the question of the relative amount of pleasure and pain, that pleasure has far outweighed the other. Pain is a constant factor in life, but it is not the predominant factor. We cannot hold the balance with steady and unbiassed hand when we try to settle this question about our own lives. At the time a little evil of the day will make all the good of all the years kick the beam, so heavily does it weigh down the scales in its own interest.

The lack of the true perspective in the picture which pessimism paints is due to a

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sentimentalism which does not take account of all the facts. It is due to generalizing in the mass from a single experience, or even without experience. Robert Louis Stevenson, who suffered much from sickness and weakness, writes in one of his letters, "That which we suffer ourselves has no longer the same air of monstrous injustice and wanton cruelty that suffering wears when we see it in the case of others. So we begin gradually to see that things are not black but have their strange compensations; and when they draw towards their worst the idea of death is like a bed to lie on. I should bear false witness if I did not declare life happy." To speak of suffering being wantonly inflicted is to fail to understand the kind of world we live in, as if it were the sport of caprice or of partiality.

The second answer to be made to this indictment of the world and this denial of God is the further fact that the worst evils



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of life are man-made. The troubles hardest to bear are those produced by the cruelty or selfishness or shame of men. There can be no blinking the fact of sin as the fertile mother of misery. Of course this is only to introduce a darker problem still, but the acknowledgment of this fact at least points the way to duty, and relieves the pressure of the impeachment of God. Out of the corrupt heart of man proceed the evils which make so much human life a hell. Malice and hatred and greed and lust and selfishness bring sorrow on countless thousands. Men defile the innocent, oppress the weak, torture the sensitive.

This can at least be said with emphasis that such facts are a trumpet-call to duty, and point the way to a high task. If much of the pain of the world is due to man's inhumanity to man, there is open to every feeling heart and to every willing soul a sphere of service to alleviate evil conditions and to chain the beast in man. What



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can be nobler than to bring solace to the world's woes and relieve the pressure somewhere? This very ideal only comes to us through religion, and religion alone can supply the adequate motive, and so only in religion can we ever approach an explanation. To reject the religious hope, on the score that the fact of evil makes belief in God impossible, is not to alleviate the evil in the slightest, but to refuse the one chance of relief.

A third fact to take account of is that while suffering has always been a great difficulty in accepting a benevolent and moral government of the world, it seems to be a condition of sentient life. Life in the only form in which we know it could not be, were this element left out. The possibility of pain is inherent in the animal organism, if only in the shape of the recurrent wants. The pains of want are explained by the part they play. As Martineau puts it, "Hunger, thirst, fa-



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tigue serve not only as heralds punctually to announce a need, but as guides and incentives to supply it. This class of pain is strictly self-corrective, and reacts into the corresponding pleasures. The tired animal sleeps, the thirsty drinks, the shivering creeps into shelter, the threatened flies or stands on its guard." Thus, some of the pain of life is necessary to keep life going. Its effect on the whole is seen to be beneficent, if life is worth while.

Further, when we come to the region of human life something follows from the fact that man's place is exalted. It is perilous in proportion that it is exalted. He possesses the glorious and dangerous gift of freedom, the power of choice with the chance of mistake and the inevitable responsibility. Freedom of will seems necessary for moral life, and so danger is bound up in the very nature of man. Huxley in one of his addresses said that if any being offered to wind him up like a

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clock so that he should always do the right and think the true, he would close with the offer and make no mourning for the loss of his moral freedom. This is typical of his fine spirit with his passionate love of all right and truth, but the idea presents a contradiction in terms. In a mechanical world where we were all wound up like clocks, and unlike the clocks we know could not go wrong, there could not be morals at all, and the passionate longing for righteousness and truth would be impossible, and Huxley's own brave and true life could never have been lived.

This also has to be said that it seems to be true that "the mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain." From man downward in a descending scale this capacity lessens, till it evidently reaches a vanishing point when we come to the cold-blooded types of life. If man is the great pain-bearer of the world, it is because of his higher organism, and because his higher type



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of life presupposes it. It is the very condition which makes his higher pleasures possible. There is needed a background, and contrasts seem necessary for the full enjoyment of life as well as for the artistic representation of life. A diet all honey soon cloy: a garden all roses loses distinction. Even the rose has a thorn at her throat. A world all laid out in Dutch gardening, without the grandeur of the hills and the waste of the seas, would pall. A life all sunshine would not content us for long. We need the shadows, and the clouds, and the twilight, and the dark, even to appreciate the light.

When our greatest artists reconstruct human life for us in drama or romance, they are forced to make use of the darker side, the crisis and the tragedy, the obstructions and privations and pains that we think only maim life. They could not make even a readable book or a tolerable play without them. It may be stated as a



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canon of art that a predetermined end is fatal to the living interest of a book, which is one of the reasons why a novel written for a purpose is seldom great. The characters must be more than puppets, and must produce in the reader a sense of freedom, which means struggle and the chance of failure. There never was a work of art produced by man in which pain and sorrow were kept out. The authors not only accept the ordinary disabilities of life, but artificially make loads of other trouble and pain for their creatures. What straits the heroes and heroines have to meet, and what deep waters they must pass through! If pain be an unmitigated evil, it is remarkable that when man gets a chance to create an ideal life and an ideal world, he should persist in inserting such huge chunks of it. Why should our highest art feel compelled to put in the shadows with such a lavish hand? It is not merely that art copies nature, and seeks to give a tran-



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script from life. The authors do it because they must, if only to make their book interesting, and to give a sphere for the development of character and for the play of human faculties. The inevitable consequence from the gift of freedom is the very evil, which is the puzzle that has attracted and baffled the human mind for ages.

When we have said all, the puzzle remains. The after-look enables us to see light at this point and at that, but we find no single formula that explains the problem. It is easy to quote comforting texts, and generally cover the sore. It is easy to hide the difficulty in sounding language about the philosophy of sorrow. There is no philosophy of sorrow. Our little plummet cannot sound the unfathomable depths of the mystery. In the presence of a great grief, our proverbs and our logic-chopping seem poor work. Try as we like, we cannot squeeze



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all the facts into any statement. We can only reach out through the darkness, and lay hold on the faith that alone makes life rational. We often begin at the wrong end, and think we need to explain things before comfort is possible. That is not the method of religion. It makes for the mountain top, and looking back into the valley can see some of the way traversed and some of the reason for it, and enters into peace.

But we can often get a solution for our personal and particular problem. Though we cannot explain the mystery of the world, we can often see light into the mystery of our own life. This personal explanation comes from the after-look into our own experience. Oscar Wilde in his prosperity, when he was a dandy and a mere phrase-monger, had said that there is enough suffering in one narrow London lane to show that God did not love man. Then, when he had suffered his dreadful



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shame and punishment, branded with the world's infamy, he wrote in *De Profundis*, "It seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world. I cannot conceive of any other explanation. I am convinced that there is no other, and that if the world has indeed as I have said been built of sorrow it has been built by the hands of love, because in no other way could the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of its perfection. Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul."

It is never the Christian view that pain and sorrow are good in themselves, or that pain can expiate sin, or please God. But it is the Christian view that everything that happens in life to a believing man can be used for the highest spiritual purposes, so that even pain can be glorified, and sorrow



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sanctified. If we believe that God's providence is over all our lives, that God's grace never leaves us, that God's love walks with us through this great wilderness, we cannot cut off a section of our life, as if it were out of His ken and had no lesson for us. The root principle of the Christian view is that life is a discipline, by which the divine love moulds human life, and through which men are trained to be sons of God. We may never get a complete explanation of the mystery of pain, but better than finding a speculative solution, it is to learn the right spirit in which all discipline should be met. That is the spirit of faith, not blind faith in that of which we have no experience, but faith which is built on the experience we already possess of the love and the justice of God. The after-look suggests and gives ground for the fore-look.

Take tribulation by itself, and it is a hideous discord, a thing against which hu-



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man nature revolts. Yet when it has come and gone, we look back and sometimes see a track of light. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless *afterwards* it yieldeth the peaceful fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." To judge it at the time is to misjudge it. It cannot be understood by itself. Looking back we see that the sore sorrow of the past which blinded us at the time did not go for nothing, that the loss which left us so poor carried another sort of riches in its bosom; that the tears which darkened the world for us washed away some stain from brain and heart; that the clouds which obscured the noonday of life grouped themselves at even for a golden sunset; that the pruner's cruel knife that left branches torn and bleeding made fruit possible in the autumn; that the disappointment which killed hope and seemed to stop the pulse of life made life after-

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wards a sweet and solemn sacrament ; that the open grave which seemed to us the end of all things really opened to us the gates of a larger life. The pathos and soft beauty of that after-look ! We do not altogether understand even then, but we see enough to make us willing to be patient and to wait.

Looking into the great darkness of the problem we can see now one side and now another of the answer which comes out of the depths. At least we see how the great mystery can be made to play a part in the training of character. It may be that we learned the meaning of sin, which before was disregarded or lightly regarded, till the chastening opened our eyes ; so that now we know what the Psalmist meant when he said, " Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept Thy word," or at least tried to keep it. Or it may be that we learned the lesson of faith, when through the chastening



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we gave up our self-conceit and self-trusting and saw into the deeper meaning of life. Or it may be that we learned the lesson of sympathy, when our proud will was broken and our selfish ambition was curbed, and ever since we have touched all life with a gentler hand and looked at it with softer eyes. It may be that pain was as the dogs that drove us like sheep to the fold when the wilderness threatened to devour us; that the law of God which is the only law of life became our law, and our stubborn feet were driven into the way of peace; so that at least after many a wandering we make the Psalmist's word ours, and confess, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." Welcome the chastening which at last can take that after-look.

There is thus no one formula to explain tribulation. It comes with its separate colour to each, and with its individual lesson. The present look is never joyous



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but grievous to all ; but what the after-look will be depends on each heart and how it has accepted the discipline. How it will seem afterwards is determined by how the present is received. The fruit that will afterwards be yielded depends on the present operations. We have our proverbs about the uses of adversity, but everything depends on how it is used. Adversity in itself is not good, any more than it is joyous, and may lead to a more grievous state than itself. The bitterness of the chastening may pass into peace, or may leave a cancered wound on the mind. The shock of the storm may end in a deeper calm where the ship of life rides securely, or in a battered wreck strewn the shores. Sorrow may bring the lesson of sympathy, or only bring a more hideous selfishness. Affliction may make the heart tender, or shut it up in cold despair or proud disdain. The fire may melt and purify, or it may harden. Chastisement



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may bring a loathing of sin, or drive to a more eager and reckless abandonment in sin. The pain of life, its pathos and its mystery, may lead us to God, or it may stiffen the haughty neck and harden the proud heart. Mere suffering, unsanctified to the soul that suffers is a curse, and not a blessing. The furnace that does not purify only consumes the heart. Only the man who has come through the hard experience can say what it has meant to him afterwards. If he has used his experience in a noble fashion, it will have left its beautiful mark on his character; but if not, there is no failure like the failure of this "afterwards." To have tasted the pain without the love that underlay it; to have been only hardened by every stroke on the anvil, to have the chastening without the lesson, the sorrow without the softening, the cross without the Christ, what failure can be like that failure?

When we open our heart to the lesson



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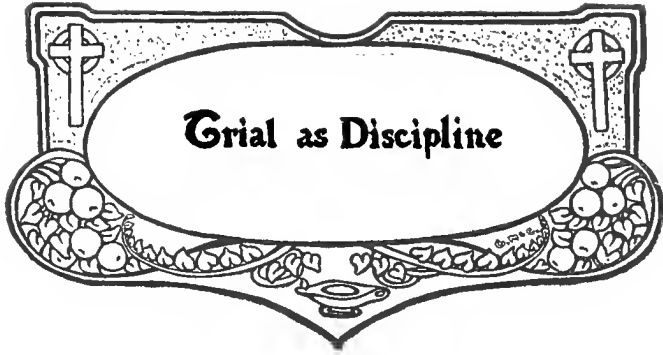
that life has a meaning and a meaning for good, that the moral world is governed by purpose and a purpose of love, we are willing to learn obedience by the things we suffer. When we bend to God's will, it becomes beautiful and even easy. Everything we experience speaks to us of a Father's heart. In this mood of faith we will come through the strife into peace. In this mood of faith discipline will yield to us the fruit of righteousness. We will not completely solve the mystery of pain, and will perhaps have no better philosophy of sorrow than before; but we will have reached for our own life a personal solution, and will see it to be the solution of faith, saving us from the sordidness of the present, and from the despair of the future. We will look forward with hope and confidence, because our life is placed in the hands of God, sure that though our present experience is not joyous but grievous, yet afterwards we will see it to be



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good, and see it to be the fruit of love. Afterwards, when the mists clear away, and we see back over the way by which we have come, the glory dies not, and the grief is past.

“Now, there are certain great angels which meet us in the way of life:—Pain is one; Failure is one; Shame is one. Pain looks us full in the eyes, and we must wrestle with him before he bless us. Failure brings in his stern hand the peace of renunciation. Shame bears to us the sense of sin, which is the knowledge of God; His hidden face shines with the mercy of heaven—and well for us if we may look into it.”



Grial as Discipline



*These are the minds that glory in the battle,
And leap and dance to hear the trumpet sound.*
—WILLIAM BLAKE.



Grial as Discipline

IF there be a moral end in human life, one purpose served by trial is to produce and strengthen and purify character. Robert Browning declared that there was nothing worth study but the incidents in the development of a soul. Perhaps that is why he, for one, found it easy to provide a place in his view of the world for pain and evil. The struggle was necessary for the high end of character, and was justified by the end. Whatever will further development and growth is sufficiently explained by its practical value. Growth is seen to be a much bigger thing than merely getting rid of weaknesses and lopping off excrescences. It is a process by which the tissue and fibre of character are built up and hardened and strengthened. If the world is to man



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an arena of moral training, and if life is a great opportunity for becoming, then we have already one simple need for some of the evils of life as mere *discipline*. It is not a complete explanation of tribulation of all sorts, but it is a partial explanation, and so far as it goes we should understand it and accept it. It is not sufficient in itself to explain the function of suffering in human life, but it is undoubtedly a place where we do see some light.

First of all, men do need to be tested and tried. In ordinary experience we accept this point of view and realize the value of a test. Professions of friendship are not accepted by us as of much account, if they are never able to bear any sort of test. Literature is full of stories of fair-weather friends who profess unlimited affection when no demand is made upon it, and who turn the cold shoulder when the sun ceases to shine. As a bridge is tested before it is accepted for use, so moral qualities need to



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be able to bear the strain. Now, apart from anything deeper, the world itself seems arranged for discipline. All that we call tribulation, pain and sorrow, and trouble, and care, certainly play this part, whatever other design may be in them. There is what the proverb calls "the reproof of life" designed to test life, of what stuff it is made. The test of the shallow ground with no depth of earth comes when it is seen that the plants are all scorched and wither away. The same test comes to the good ground, and the seed in it only grows to greater richness and fruit. It is well to remember then that trial of some kind is necessary, and is designed not to make us break under it, but to prove that we do not break.

This value of trial as a test is accepted in the whole history of religion. St. Paul could write to the Philippians, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for



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His sake." It was a time when it meant something to believe in Christ. The time of the great systematic persecutions had not yet come, because Christianity was not a big enough thing to attract the attention of government. When it grew strong enough in numbers and influence to be a factor in the social and political life of the people, it became time for the state to strike at it officially. There was as yet no organized and concerted scheme to stamp it out. But though there were no wholesale official persecutions the Church was never without its trials and hardships. The early literature shows very simply some of these. It had to contend against the ignorance and brutal injustice of the mob, and against the cynical opposition and sneering insolence of the ruling class and the learned class. It had to make its way against established customs and ingrained prejudices. There were vested rights and privileged monopolies in trades and pro-



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fessions. All that malice and envy and hatred could do was done. Often persecution was none the less bitter because it was unofficial and local, rather than over the whole Empire.

Besides physical violence which often was their portion, we can understand some of the hardships involved in making the Christian profession. It meant the loss of all social position, and often the breaking of family ties. Ambition, political and professional, had to die in the soul of a would-be Christian. We surely have enough insight and historical perspective to realize, however vaguely, some of the inevitable sufferings which converts had to face. The learning of the schools was of course against this new faith; the wisdom of ages denounced it; philosophers sneered and priests raged. It was an innovation if nothing else, and the world has always some stones to throw at innovators. The world can always find some tender place in



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a man's heart where it can strike and hurt unto death.

Every man who has tried to be true knows something of the need for endurance and has experienced the testing process. It is always easier to go with the crowd, easier to give up the agony of conflict with a sin of self and the necessity of protest against the sin of the world. We all know some of the hundred and one temptations to conform with all established ways and thoughts, and have felt some of the hundred and one influences which militate against high principle. In a profounder sense than outside enmity a man has always to suffer for his faith. He cannot believe truly and intensely without pain. Faith is not a surface emotion, but goes to the very roots of existence and brings the upheaval of a life. It is not an opinion received ready-made. It touches the centre of the heart and works out in strenuous life. Virtue has to go out of a



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man who lives the life of faith above the level of his environment. He is quite prepared to accept the need and the value of a test.

Even in our surface worldly-wise opinions, which float lightly on the stream of thought, we admit much of this. We admit that the test of faith in anything is willingness to suffer. The test of courage is when a real occasion calls for it. The test of patriotism is readiness to make sacrifice for country. Lukewarm adherence to a party or a cause is a source of weakness. All the fighting has to be done by men of other mould. When victory in anything is assured, there are plenty brazen throats to scream hallelujah and brazen brows seeking to be crowned by the laurels of triumph. The faith which costs nothing is worth nothing. It does not go deep enough. Some men, as the Scottish proverb goes, will put their hand twice to their bonnet for once to their pouch. It



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does not cost much to salute a man or a scheme. The test of all manner of devotion must be practical. The lady in the age of chivalry set her knight-errant to do some difficult task which he accomplished for love of her or died in the attempt. The principle is right, though the applications were often absurd.

This testing process, approved even by worldly wisdom to measure the value of any man's adhesion to a cause, is one to which life itself must submit. The higher our conception is of the inherent worth of life, the more are we willing to admit the place of this element. If we are persuaded that nothing can compare with the incidents in the development of a soul, we can see a meaning in much that is called tribulation. What the tribulation is that comes to test every soul, only that soul knows, but that some trial of it comes is certain. Somewhere and somehow the gold is tried in the furnace. Somewhere



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and somehow faith is tried by life. Where the soil is good, the hot sun quickens the seed and stings the plant into growth. Where there is no deepness of earth the hot sun scorches the plant and withers it away.

Though this element does not explain all tribulation, we must at least see its use and its necessity. Even pain, which is such a terror to a soft and luxurious age, has some meaning from this point of view. If there is any moral purpose of discipline in the world, then we must accept this value of tribulation. Life is at least, whatever else, an arena of moral struggle where we are called on to play the man, and the opportunities of trial that come have at least this meaning in them. Soldiers are meant not merely for parade but for battle. "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" is an appeal to which the high heart responds, and sees in it some meaning. Indeed this is ever the



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method of the faith. Jesus always appealed to something of the heroic. He made no disciples by guile, and allured no man to Himself by soft promises. The shadow of a cross lies athwart all His teaching. He points to effort, and conflict, and suffering. He called men to follow Him, though He had no place to lay His head, daring them to believe on Him, daring them to suffer for His sake. That is how He catches men. Suffering may be said to be the badge of the tribe. Ananias was sent to Saul in Damascus with this promise to the blinded and stricken man, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." If Paul had been of the type that stumbles when tribulation or persecution ariseth, he could never have been used for the church or the world. A staff that bends and breaks, when weight is put on it, is useless for support.

There is more to be said about the na-

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ture of trial than that it is a test. The strain is not put merely to see who will stand and who will fail. We see this further use in it, that it is not merely to try good but to increase good. Strength comes through the strain. "The bruising flails of God's corrections" are meant to thresh out the useless chaff, and give value to the wheat. Tribulation is not trial merely but *discipline*, an occasion for growth, to deepen faith and enrich life. The first fresh rapture has to be transmuted into the crowning quality of endurance. Discipline is not exhausted either by the thought of punishment or by the thought of testing, but is itself a means of giving power. There comes the new strength of a surrendered life, gaining in power and in beauty.

In fact we see that this is the process by which religion itself became more spiritual—through tribulation. We see it in the history of Israel from the discipline of the



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desert to the discipline of the exile. Many Psalms are an expression of a faith disciplined into patience, the faith of a race who have seen their hopes and earthly loves go down to the grave, but who have seen the dawning of a larger hope and a purer love. We see again and again faith rising from the tomb, purified by adversity, barren of human hope, but luminous with the light of God's presence. It is not without meaning that there came a great outburst of sacred song *after* the exile, when faith saw deeper into itself and learned from tribulation to cling all the closer to God. It is something for us to lay firm hold of this fact that what we look upon as tribulation hardly to be borne has meaning and purpose, and is designed not that we should fail in the test and stumble because of the darkness, but that we should stand, and indeed gather new strength from the strain, and step into fuller light after the passage through the cloud.



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This is the right point of view from which to consider the whole question of temptation. It is not all a hideous evil, or the Apostle's word would be astounding irony when he called on his readers to count it all joy when they fall into diverse temptations. Few of us, it may be, are built in such heroic mould that we can give a joyous welcome to the trials of our life, and most of us have sad cause to dread being tempted much. Our souls carry scars of ugly wounds, and there are gaping strains which show where the lines of weakness ran. But many of us have been taught enough to know now that temptation is not all evil, and though our joy is chastened and almost silent for very shame, yet we can humbly add our testimony to the value of trial. Temptation to begin with is really a colourless word, and can be used of an experience that may end either well or ill. This is because there is an element of mere trial



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in it, being put to the proof and tested. When a piece of work is tested it is not done with an evil purpose. It is not done in the hope that it may fail, still less is it done in order to make it fail, but to prove that it does not fail. It means something, when it comes out with the stamp of approval.

If this were all, if it were merely a sort of experiment or for the satisfaction of finding out who stood and who failed, temptation could not be morally justified. It is a cruel experiment to cause needless pain and danger and run foolish risks. So, temptation is not a barren experiment but a source of good. It is not only testing, it is also *training*. It is more than a proving of faith, it is a discipline of character. Trial means the opportunity for rising, and carries with it the danger of falling. The power to resist is got through resisting, as an oak cannot be grown in a hothouse but out on the hillside where it must meet the blasts and gather strength



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through the strain. The fighting fibre is developed in the fight. The blade is tempered in the fire. The capacity to rise comes from the effort to rise. Discipline is more than an examination to test the stuff of which we are made, but also provides the occasion for straining and strengthening the moral thews and sinews. Strength comes *through* the strain. Only when the fibre is hard and close can a really strong, enduring character be cut. Temptation is the pressure of the lower on the higher, the constant desire to take the easy way, to give in to the clamant demand for low satisfaction. That is the environment for developing moral life, and until the evil is admitted and the low demands conceded there is no sin. The real evil is not to be traced to untoward circumstances, but to our own appetite and sinful desire. If we were menaced by no danger and tried by no temptation, there could be no growth, as our own hearts inform us.



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To take this whole point of view, however, we must have learned to look below the surface of things, and must have a conception of life which sees its end to be not happiness but character. The world is a refining pot to produce pure ore, and life is a school of discipline to make true men. Life is emptied of any moral significance if this element of discipline be denied. A great London doctor received a visit from a professional man who complained of depression and asserted that he could not do his work without the constant use of stimulants. The doctor who saw the danger forbade the resort to stimulants at any cost and when the patient declared that he must surely sink, he replied, "Then sink like a man." Many a time in the straits what we need is bracing and not pampering, and our common servile creed that we must give way in the line of least resistance needs to be branded as the unworthy thing it is. There is always

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another way than the craven way of escape, and in the dark hour faith assures a man that he can win out, or at least can put up a manly fight.

Very often another name for faith is courage. In its heart of hearts all the world loves courage, as it loves a lover, the courage to face life which is often far greater than the courage to face death. It is much when a man has learned to keep a stiff upper lip, and has seen that one purpose of his life's discipline is to teach endurance. Our hearts leap to the trumpet-sound, and we will always grant value to the soldier's ideal, to fight the fight manfully and go on with the task and duty of life bravely. There is an old English ballad in which a wounded captain rallies his soldiers to further struggle,

Fight on, my men, Sir Andrew said,
A little I'm hurt but not yet slain,
I'll just lie down and bleed a while,
And then I'll rise and fight again!



Trial as Discipline

Often to others than soldiers this ideal of life has in it a touch of nobility. Dumas puts into the mouth of his favourite character, D'Artagnan, when age seems creeping on him, that the recollection of what he has done as a soldier prevents him from bowing his old head too soon. "I shall remain until the very end a good trooper; and when my turn comes I shall fall perfectly straight, all in a heap." The man to whom he is represented saying this had been the greatest man in France next the King, and was now facing disgrace, and poverty, and prison, if not death. "An excellent homily," he said after a moment's pause. "A soldier's homily," replied D'Artagnan.

This stoical philosophy has produced some real heroism in practical life. To see a thing out to the end however hard it may be, to die in harness, to run the course pluckily to a finish even though the prize is lost, to stick at the task manfully and

Grial as Discipline

go through with it, that temper will always command admiration. Courage is a great moral quality, not the common courage of dash and excitement, but the courage of a long-sustained effort. In the matter of living and carrying on its duties through sunshine or storm, through success or failure, courage is only another name for faithfulness.

The Christian virtue of faithfulness is the Stoic virtue of courage with deeper roots to it and finer flower. In the great review it is not the kind of work that counts, but the spirit of the worker, not the number of the gifts, but the use of them. Life is judged according to the quality of faithfulness contained in it. The servant with the two gifts had the same welcoming word as the servant with five or ten. The Christian virtue of faithfulness has a deeper root than the Stoic virtue of courage; for its motive is much nobler than to "die game," its motive is



Trial as Discipline

to live as becometh a child of God, set to his task by his heavenly Father, and so called to walk worthy of his great vocation. Because of this deeper root the Christian virtue has a finer flower. It shows itself not only in unbending endurance against ill-doing, but also in unwearied perseverance in well-doing.

We should respond a little more eagerly to the appeal life makes to the heroic in us. It is only proof of the shallowness of our nature that we are so easily dispirited and make such a moan about our hard lot. If the plough make deep furrows, it will make it possible for the seed to have root, and grow till it bears fruit. We have too surface a view of life, if we shrink from discipline and are so soon tempted to give up. We are too ready to judge life by what we can get from it and not by what we can give it. We say that the enemy is too hard to dislodge, a besetting sin in



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our own lives is too stubborn, a rampant evil in our community is too deeply rooted, the beautiful kingdom of heaven of our dream is quite beyond us, something in the clouds. We need some iron in our blood, and need to face the strain to gather strength. We need to be braced to the conflict again and to endure not for a while merely but so long as the conflict lasts. When the tired prophet sought to give up his hard task and thought it too much that he should be pitted against the persecution which he knew, he was told for answer that he would have more to bear. He was only braced for harder tasks. The answer to his complaint against the hardness of his lot is an assertion that it shall be harder yet, "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" God appeals to his strength and not to his weakness. He is taught the need of endurance, and sent



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out to his harder task with a new resolution. It is ever so. Lacordaire said that the Church was born crucified, and certainly the word to the suffering Church was, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." When we have caught sight of God's presence with us and believe that He has a purpose for us, we become sure that we can endure to the end. Never a soul is tried above what it can bear.

The prophetic interpretation of national history finds a value in adversity and distress, to save the soul from being smothered by sense, and to give stiffening for the large needs of life. Nations simple in manners and sweet in morals grip the world by inherent right. Pure at the heart and clean in the blood, they come from their particular desert with the stamp of superiority on them. Success is their danger. New ropes cannot shackle Sam



Trial as Discipline

son, but he can be bound by Delilah's silken tresses. The great oriental empires, Assyria and Babylon and Persia, European empires like Rome and Spain, took their rightful place of ascendancy through toil and struggle; then rotted at the heart, smothered by success, and shrivelled at a touch of God's east wind. Plutarch in his life of Alexander the Great describes how he and his Macedonian troops became lax and flaccid amid the wealth and riot made possible by their wonderful victories. Alexander himself from the extreme temperance and control of his youth became self-indulgent, was sometimes almost mad with wine, and died of a carousal. The once hardy soldiers became dissolute and riotous, and the huge fabric of his empire crumbled down into dust.

It is not needful to pile up illustration of what is the plain reading of history writ on its open face of



Trial as Discipline

What makes a nation great and keeps it so,
What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat.

The lesson is for the reading of the nations. The prophetic picture of Jeshurun waxing fat and sleek and then forsaking God is one for warning of all peoples. When we have a glut of wealth in our midst and our fleets are in every sea, when we are rich and increased in goods, when we lift our head in the pride of possession, when we are made to ride on the high places of the earth and eat the world's increase, then is the very time to beware. These things are not our guarantee for continued existence. What strength abroad can make up for weakness at home? When it becomes increasingly difficult for men to live true, honest, and pure lives, when the heart of the people turns feverishly after the love of money or the love of enjoyment, when the simple pleasures are despised and the simple virtues are dethroned and the simple duties



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are neglected, when we leave God out of account in all our calculations and politics and business and diplomacy, then it is time to beware lest we are weighed in the balance and found wanting. Only righteousness exalteth a nation, justice at home and mercy abroad. That is the unchanging law of God.

In the individual life the same truth is seen that the temptation is greatest where the danger seems least. There is a place for the desert in all our lives. It is hard doctrine, but it is true. It is because it is hard that our eyes can be so easily blinded. The keenest test of a man comes when he has attained. The struggle to attain keeps him strong, but the line of least resistance soon shows itself in success. Pride, self-sufficiency, sloth, discontent, and a score of possibilities emerge, kissed into being by the sunshine of fortune. Bacon in his succinct fashion says, "The virtue of prosperity is temperance, the



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virtue of adversity is fortitude. Prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." We know that there is a success which is failure. This thought of the danger of prosperity in either corrupting a man's heart or making him lose his head is common enough to have inspired proverbs. Put a beggar on horseback, and if he does not ride to the devil he deserves the horse. We even believe, with Shakespeare, that there are some sweet uses in adversity. We all know men who have been spoiled by success, and men who have been made great by failure. God's dearest saints we have sometimes found among His sufferers, sweet souls whose bruising emits fragrance. We know the moral as well as the story of the lotus eaters. We perhaps see that there is temptation in both extremes, in adversity to curse God and die, in prosperity to forget God and live.

In spite of all this knowledge, is not



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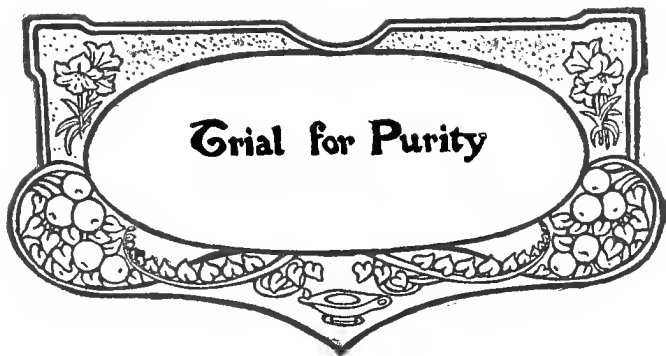
our ideal of life coloured by the lotus eaters' dream? Ease, and comfort, and security of tenure, absence of anxiety and care, these things we look forward to as the end. If we are honest with ourselves, we will confess that we have needed all the shocks and lessons, all the experiences that we see to have been providences, everything that brings us up and opens our eyes to fact. The sleek life, which we prize so much, may contain for us the greatest danger. To be compassed about, and cared for, and sheltered from every wind, and with every material blessing poured upon us, may be the very undoing of our true selves. Better God's east wind which kills or cures, which brings us in touch with realities however tragic, which reminds us that this world has only meaning as somehow a school of discipline and not as an isle of the lotus. Better God's east wind with its lessons of life and death than the sickly sweetness



Trial as Discipline

which deprives life of its outlook into
eternity.

We know the arduous strife, the eternal laws
To which the triumph of all good is given
High sacrifice, and labour without pause
Even to the death.





*No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace
As I have seen in one autumnal face.*

—DONNE.



Trial for Purity

TRIAL has not done its perfect work in merely building up a virile and strong character. There is a further effect in producing fineness of quality, as the potter puts his finest work on the delicate chasing of the vessel after the actual making of it is completed. The stone from the quarry needs to be hewn and chiselled and shaped, its surface smoothed, its rough edges removed. The marks of the chisel are on it as it finds its destined place in the building. If men are to be used as living stones in the great temple of human lives, the great Master-builder must shape them to fit His world-purpose. Character can bear shaping and refining as well as strengthening; and this is one of the uses to which affliction has often been put.



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Some of the words to express the pain of life indicate this purifying quality. One of them is the word tribulation, from the Latin *tribulum*, which was an instrument made of a block with iron teeth stuck in it and used for threshing grain. Naturally, the process of separating the chaff from the wheat was made a vivid metaphor for a state of suffering or trial to thresh human life. It has been a common experience that affliction can be used to purify life, cleansing motives, and elevating ambitions, separating the unworthy from the worthy as grain is winnowed from its impurities.

Another common figure likens judgment to the smelting of impure ore. In smelting, the ore is treated in a furnace to separate the metals. The last process through which it passes is refining, getting rid of the last traces of the materials associated with the particular metal which it is desired to have pure. This figure is



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used as one of the common explanations, which the Old Testament gives for the whole problem of suffering. In a dirge over the moral and spiritual decay of Jerusalem, Isaiah speaks of the need of judgment to restore it to a pure state again, "I will turn my hand upon thee, and throughly purge away thy dross, and will take away all thy alloy." Part of the moral power of the Old Testament lies in the fact that it always seeks to connect punishment with sin. It is not in itself a sufficient explanation, as the writers themselves are forced to admit, since there are in the world so many instances which seem to prove that justice is blind of an eye and lame of a foot. All the ground is by no means covered when we say that it is well with the righteous, and that the unrighteous must learn through pain that God hates sin. It does not explain a tithe of the mystery; for one of the most evident facts is that suffering comes very



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often to those who do not seem to need it, and that the wicked are seen to prosper. This is the great problem of the book of Job and some of the finest Psalms; and it has been a problem ever since.

It is an instinct with us that we live in a moral universe, and if so, some suffering can be explained as one of the wholesome sanctions of law. The fact that suffering is related to sin is a safeguard, as physical pain is often a warning against disease, a danger signal of which a wise man will take note. Nature makes a fairly plain path, and hedges it with penalties. The first view of life takes it as natural that favour should be shown to good and enmity to evil. It may be too surface a view of the way in which the world is governed, and by itself it would certainly be an unspiritual conception of life; for if goodness is to be judged by outward prosperity it would often be as a flower which grows in a night and which the first breeze



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of adversity would wither. It would not be the highest motive to be good if we could only say about it that it brings prosperity. Still, so far as it goes the argument is cogent enough, that men should see that it does not pay to do evil. It is an instinct of our heart to believe this, and if the world is governed in a moral way, essentially we are right in looking for happy results to the good man.

Our whole human society is regulated by ourselves on this basis. We make it at least one function of punishment to deter from breaking law. There may be an element of retribution in our legal punishments, to assert the offended majesty of the law, but as a social function perhaps the chief idea in our punishments is preventive. We remember the judge's dictum when he passed the sentence of capital punishment on a horse stealer, "You are to be hanged by the neck, not for stealing horses, but that horses may not be stolen."



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If punishment were looked upon merely as a device to protect society, to frighten other people from committing the same faults, it would be a purely selfish scheme which would deserve failure. The failure of our laws here only suggests that we need deeper sanctions for morality than such external ones as that honesty is the best policy. Even if facts did prove that it does not pay to do evil, it would not be a sufficient ground for true morality. It would only be a kind of prudence.

A man cannot be called a good man in any real sense unless his life is regulated by principles within. He is not really righteous, until he would not put forth his hand to iniquity whatever the consequences. Even although the moral world seemed topsyturvy, he has that within him which refuses to let him be moved. Hope of reward and fear of punishment are motives on a low plane. They are probably necessary in the education of the



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race and of the individual, but they are at best only rudimentary morality. They are like leading strings to teach a child to walk, or like stakes to support a young tree, to be taken away when the tree becomes self-sufficient. The child has not learned to walk, till he can do without the leading strings. The tree may be the better of the stakes at first, but they are not part of its life, and it would be a sickly plant if it could not do without them. Our laws may have to appeal to some extent to the motive of prudence, but a man cannot be called good if he merely refrains from evil from fear of the policeman. Before what he does, or abstains from doing, can be called moral it must correspond to an inward judgment of right. It must be more than blind obedience to a rule, and more than a decision on the ground of what is likely to pay best. If we ruled our conduct only so as to keep out of prison, it would be a misuse of language to



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call it goodness. The true root of duty is inward conformity to conscience, conformity to a standard set up in a man's own soul.

All history and all experience seem designed to drive us to this deeper level. Israel learned through exile and tribulation that goodness is not to be judged by external prosperity. Religion itself was spiritualized by the hard process, until faith came as pure gold twice refined out of the furnace. The deepening of faith went on, until in Christ the very cross itself was made the sign of the highest triumph. With that object-lesson before us we can never again base morality on mere prudence. In the light of the cross an apostle could see that men might suffer according to the will of God, and he could call upon all such to commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing. In the light of the cross also we see how chastening itself may be the fruit of



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the deepest love. God's purpose in sanctification is seen to be so high and so great that it justifies any means. "Those He means to make the most resplendent, He hath oftenest His tools upon."

The element of correction and chastisement contains meaning and value for us. All that we need for humble acceptance of it, and for comfort in it, is to be sure that it is directed by both justice and love. The matter of justice is usually fairly clear to us, since we can easily see where we needed the curb or the spur, but only faith can convince us that chastening is also the fruit of love. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, like all the New Testament writers, makes much of endurance and the need for patience under trial. The early Christians had all the ordinary sorrow which is the lot of man, with some extra heart-aches and some acuter pain due to their historical position. They



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would often ask why, if God loved them, they should be called on to suffer. They must have asked, as all men are some time driven to ask, what is the meaning of the chastenings, the strokes that seem struck by blind fate, the shocks on the heart, the disillusionment and failure and pain of life. They would feel, as every brave man has felt, the force of the appeal to be true and steadfast, whether the reason for the suffering is ever explained or not.

In that Epistle the first appeal is to the stubborn heroism of which man is capable, and we never can escape the force of that. When we read the sublime chapter on the heroes of faith who subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, and of those who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonments, who were stoned, sawn asunder, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not



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worthy, the generous blood rushes to the head with the proud thought that men had shown such strength of soul, and with the eager emulous hope that we might not prove unworthy of such a lineage. The author points to these as a great cloud of witnesses, the noble dead who look for similar triumphs in the noble living. As the climax of that argument he points them to Jesus their Lord, who endured the cross and despised the shame. Lest they should be weary and faint in their minds he asks them to consider how patiently their Master endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.

Then he comes closer to the heart of the mystery when he gives what is in some form or other the Christian explanation, that even when it seems like chastisement it is the chastisement of perfect love. The form the explanation takes here is perhaps more applicable to the elder patriarchal rule of families than



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the ordinary rule of to-day, "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence." Perhaps the correction and the reverence about balance each other with us. But in this figure the author is careful to contrast, as well as compare, God's dealings with those of an earthly parent. In the latter case it too often is the result of caprice or temper, or at least with insufficient knowledge even when there is true love at the bottom of the correction. In God's case to be in subjection to the Father of our spirits is truly to live. It is the very sign of their sonship that God should take them in hand, and they can be perfectly sure that nothing can happen capriciously, but out of love and for their true profit.

Correction, even chastisement, may be accepted as an element of the problem to us; for while it is true that we cannot always trace sin as the occasion of suffering, yet we know that there is such a connec-



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tion. We know this, not merely because there are many surface facts which convince us that we are in a moral world of cause and effect, but also because experience teaches us the moral value of tribulation. We learn that rightly viewed it has some power in our own case of purifying life. Suffering has been a cleansing discipline. If the one object of life were to get through the world smoothly and the highest ideal were happiness, then there could be nothing but evil in suffering. But if the soul has wakened within us, we know there is a spiritual end which may justify any means however hard and painful. The spectacle of the wicked prospering and living at ease, while the righteous are compassed about with sorrows, does not trouble us much, when we put life into spiritual perspective. The answer of St. Ambrose to the question why the wicked do not suffer and toil with the righteous is from this point of view a good



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one. He illustrates this by the figure common in the ancient world of the athletic ring. They who have not put down their names to strive for the crown are not bound to undergo the labours of the contest. They who have not gone down into the arena do not anoint themselves with oil nor get covered with dust. The perfumed spectators merely look on, and do not join in the struggle nor endure the sun, the heat, the dust, and the showers. If the athletes ask them to join in the strife the spectators can answer that they are not in for the prize and forego the chance of glory. After all, it depends on what a man really aims at and strives to achieve. If he is only looking for an easy time, he can usually avoid some of the hardships of a strenuous life. There will be some things concerning which he is a spectator rather than a combatant.

We know from experience that there is



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truth in the partial answer that all forms of distress and trouble can be used to purify, and to serve noble spiritual ends. It has made life more solemn and sacred to many. Even as a mere correction many a soul has found the value of some affliction in turning the heart from evil. We did not know the evil, did not recognize it as such, until the cleansing discipline. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," said the Psalmist. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn Thy statutes." This is a common experience and is a recognized result of chastening. Few of us perhaps would ever have known penitence, if we had not been brought to humility of heart through some slight, or disappointment, or trouble. We have gone on in thoughtlessness or willfulness, until we have been pulled up to review our past, and to consider our ways.

Sickness, for instance, has been to many an occasion to think, a time for recollec-



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tion, which is so much a lost art to-day in the strain and hurry of modern life. Amid the exacting nature of business and pleasure, in the pressure of our social conditions and the pace at which life goes, it is easy to forget the things of the soul. Many a man has had cause to bless the stroke that snatched him from the fret and fever of the world and drove him to a place of repair. We live our life on the surface amid distractions, engrossed with outside affairs, and few would take refuge under the shadow of the Almighty but for the discipline that compels. It is difficult, says the proverb, to carry a full cup without spilling. In the sunshine of constant prosperity men are easily entangled in the snare of wealth; they grow arrogant and hard and self-centred, and the dullest eye can see how much they lose. In the higher reaches of the spiritual life the sweetest souls are those who know and admit the value of the furnace of affliction. There has been



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many a fine character which, if you took out the qualities created by sorrow, would lose all its beauty.

If the world be at all a sphere of moral discipline and a place of training for spiritual men, then some light is cast upon the dark problem that men should be tried as gold is tried. It adds to the dignity of human life, and convinces us that we are worth something that the Lord should turn His hand upon us, and thoroughly purge away our dross, and take away all the alloy. This has been one of the answers which religious men have always made to the whole mystery of pain. Augustine says, "The fire is kindled in the furnace, and the refiner's furnace is a thing of high mysterious meaning. There is gold there; there is chaff; there is fire working in a confined space. This fire is not diverse, yet its effects are diverse; it turns chaff into ashes; from gold it takes away the dross. Now those in whom God dwells



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are assuredly made better in tribulation, being proved as gold." Even hearts that have suffered the most desolating sorrows have been able to read some meaning in their hard experience. There are blows of bereavement or betrayal, from which men never recover to the outward eye, and yet which have been the means of their learning the eternal secret. There are some wounds that cannot be staunched except by God.

It has always to be remembered, however, that trials do not in themselves sanctify, but they are only the occasion of sanctification. Affliction by itself cannot make a man better. God works by joy as well as by sorrow, and many of the world's best virtues are the result of happiness, as many of its worst sins are the result of suffering. There is a kind of suffering that impoverishes, and there is a kind that enriches. Everything depends on the way it is met, and received, and



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used. It works in some men weak repining, or morose selfishness, or bitter envy, or even wild malice. Instead of making a man more gentle and tender, suffering may make him desire only to see others suffer also and take revenge on others for his own pain. It often only brutalizes. Thus we see some who have come through many trials hard and relentless in dealing with their unfortunate fellows. Affliction may stiffen a man to sternness and cruelty. If sorrow is not turned into humility of heart and into a stream of tenderness to others, it will only stagnate in the soul and breed bitterness against God and man.

We know that lives often reach the highest and best in pain, but we must never harbour the idea that pain is good in itself. That opens the way to nameless evils, the dreadful excesses of asceticism, or the callous cruelty of selfishness. Mere pain, unsanctified to the soul that



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suffers, has no value. The furnace without this result only burns away the life into a charred nothingness. We have to learn obedience, and to see that God is perfecting His work in us, and to accept the King's highway of the Holy Cross as His will for us. We need to use our painful experience to leave its mark on character, and accept the particular discipline, seeking to learn its inward meaning. It is nothing more than opportunity, which may be seized or lost. "It may be," says Jeremy Taylor, "that this may be the last instance and the last opportunity that ever God will give thee to exercise any virtue, to do Him any service or thyself any advantage. Be careful that thou lovest not this; for to eternal ages this never shall return again." If this world be a place of discipline and if God have a purpose of cleansing, if He condescend to turn His hand upon us to purge away the dross and take away the



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alloy, then the greatest failure in all the world is that we should miss the discipline. Or rather, worse than missing it, is it to have had it and to have lost its benefits, to have gone through the fire unpurified, to have been made only more hard and more rebellious by every stroke, to have tasted the chastisement without the love that directed it, to have the pain without the lesson, the death of self without the life in God. Better, however little we understand, to submit humbly to the rod, and to open the heart to the lesson.

We can at least see that there are certain virtues which are produced through all this painful experience of human life, and that somewhere there is a meaning which explains the mystery. We may think that the pruning knife which cuts so deep into the plant will kill it, or at least maim it, and keep it from the full luxuriance of life; and yet every gardener knows



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that the fruit is the result of the pruning, and that without the knife the plant might run all to leaves. The fruits of the process are seen in such virtues as gentleness, a new humility, patience, steadfastness of soul, detachment from the world, all which would have little chance of making appearance apart from trial. That some lessons are needed by all we readily admit; for the best qualities of our nature can only come to maturity by exercise. A virtue or a grace cannot be given us as alms are given to a beggar. If we pray for humility, we must be willing to endure that which produces humility—and that may be humiliation. If we desire patience, we must consent to the means which alone can create it. "Though God take the sun out of heaven we must have patience," said George Herbert, but the very way in which this patience is produced is by God seeming to take the sun out of heaven. It is only by repeated



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trial that this sweet grace is developed. If we put down our name for this crown, we must be willing to accept the necessary conditions.

No virtue comes to us ready-made. Montaigne begins his essay on Cruelty with a sentence that brings out this truth, "I fancy virtue to be something else, and something more noble, than good nature and the mere propensity to goodness with which we are born into the world." So it is with the other virtues which indeed we look upon as the specific Christian virtues, like gentleness and humility. They only come through this very cleansing discipline which is so hard to bear. If it could be said of our Lord Himself that He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, we can see, though unable to unravel the mysteries of Providence, that there are things for us to learn in every experience. We see that the world has been too much with us, and that there is a



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higher life to which we are called, a life of faith and communion, of submission to God and obedience to His will.

When we take God into our life and believe that His design for us is dictated by love we can simply and humbly accept many things as chastisement, the turning of His hand upon us to purge away the dross and take away all the alloy. Everything depends on the spirit with which we accept our experience and let it speak to us of God and His love. When we are sure that God is turning His hand upon us, it can even change a sorrow into joy. The touch of the fire which we have felt is the very seal of purity which He has purposed for us. The weight of the blow is the brand of possession, His possession of us, with our life thus claimed for God, with His mark on the very flesh. The sorrow is changed into a sign of love. The marks of struggle against sin are marks of the Lord Jesus.



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This suggests the method of achieving the high results of life's training. It is the method of faith. We gain the highest life not by struggling but by submitting, not by contest but by obedience. It is a common experience that a man does his best work when he ceases to care, when he gives up worrying about reputation, or success, or even the quality of the work. When we make submission to the discipline, and are willing to accept the conditions of our life, we discover that for the first time we have surmounted them. It does not mean retiral from the field, but the acceptance of all our lot. Faith brings us into line with the limitless resources of the soul. We enter into peace when we believe that as the earthly lights go out, it is God who fills the dark. When every support has gone, we make trial of the up-bearing might of the eternal love, as the swimmer knows, because he tests, the buoyancy of the sea. We need this re-

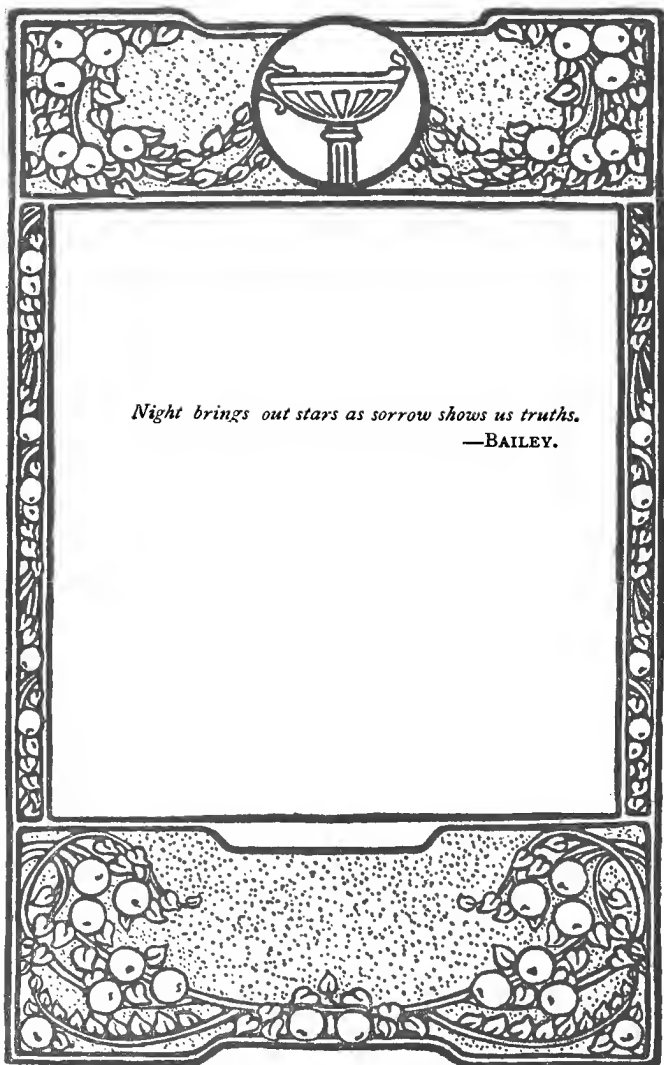


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inforcement of power, if we are to continue. Our activities can look after themselves, if our life has been deepened and enriched. Mere duty by itself grows irksome and vexatious and we chafe against it as a restraint on liberty ; but love of duty comes by the way of patient obedience.



Sorrow and Insight



Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truths.
—BAILEY.



Sorrow and Insight

STILL another thing we learn, which helps our partial explanation of the great mystery, is that through it there can come to the soul a new insight into life. Often it has only been through some sad experience that men have been shown much that previously was unregarded. They learned that there is a strength which is perfected in weakness, and a great gain which is secured by a great loss, and a joy even which is found in the heart of pain. The bitter water of sorrow has been a fountain of revelation to many, who otherwise would have been content to live on the surface of things. This is true even of the possibilities of our own nature. It is often when we have been brought very low that we see for the first time how high we can rise. Most



Sorrow and Insight

of us need some instrument of self-knowledge, and when we think of the work it has to do, we do not wonder that often the instrument has to be a sharp one. The way of tears is often the way of insight.

In the ordinary course of prosperous life the sensibilities are blunted, and the perceptions are dimmed. Faults grow like rank weeds in untilled soil. We become blind to the real persons we are, and hide our true nature from ourselves. Think what special pleaders we become to prove how much in the right we always are. We seldom face up to an honest and complete self-investigation. We are always ready with apologies for our conduct and our position. Our eyes are holden that we cannot see what manner of persons we are. Nothing is possible to us, until we are willing to recognize ourselves, and until we cease deceiving ourselves. The estimates that men obviously put on them-



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selves are laughable sometimes to the candid observer, and nothing can open their eyes to the facts except a shock.

Whether we think it worth the cost or not, it is a fact that sorrow rightly used does give insight into one's self, as well as into the larger life of the world. The chastened soul gets some truer views, and often emerges a truer and nobler self. George Eliot says of one of her great characters, "Adam Bede had not outlived his sorrow—had not felt it slip from him as a temporary burthen, and leave him the same man again. Do any of us? God forbid. It would be a poor result of all our anguish and our wrestling, if we won nothing but our old selves at the end of it—if we could return to the same blind loves, the same self-confident blame, the same light thoughts of human suffering, the same feeble sense of that Unknown towards which we have sent forth irrepressible cries in our loneliness. Let us



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rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love.”

It is this new insight also which gives us a gracious touch with other life, saving us from hardness and self-absorption. In a picture in Milan there is a cherub, trying to feel one of the points of the crown of thorns with his forefinger. There is a look of childish wonder, and a lack of comprehension on the face, and yet a desire to comprehend. It is a fine conception of the artist. It was all a mystery to the cherub, who could not be supposed to understand anything of the great passion of the Lord. Pain is a mere word to the being that never felt pain. “Have you ever been laid up yourself, sir?” a young man on his death-bed asked another young man who visited him by way of comfort. It re-



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vealed a longing for exact appreciation of the situation, and an instinct that true sympathy could only come from actual knowledge.

Such hours of insight not only give inspiration to make life more worthy, but also give illumination into the things of real value in a human life. Through it we reach clearer judgments of the past of the world, as well as the present. We learn that the real history of a period does not consist of the great deeds and memorable dates which historians love to chronicle. How history has erred in its view of the importance of things! Emperors and rulers and battles and the things that make a splash took precedence then, but are now seen to be nothing compared with things weak and despised and unknown. One is continually being struck by the vulgarity of recorded history, the vulgarity which is attracted by show and tinsel, which is hide-bound by the outward, which for-



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sakes the movements of the soul of man for the movements of camps and courts. Years afterwards the true history of the period is discovered in some unthought-of corner of life and literature. It is not the contemporary historians' fault altogether that they often fail to reflect the spirit of their age. It is so easy to think Ahab the king greater than Elijah the prophet, so easy to consider the founding of a dynasty more important than the genesis of a thought. Who could be expected to neglect the Empire of Rome to look at the kingdom of heaven which cometh not with observation? If we were asked to give a list of the features of our age, in most cases the lists would be of as materialistic a character, even if railways and electricity and turbines took the place of battles and kings and nobles. When the real history of our time comes to be known, who can tell what silent forces and unseen movements and unknown men will

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fill the pages? All the world trembled at a nod from Cæsar—and the man Jesus went to His cross, while a few Galileans trembled at His anguish and death. All Jerusalem was pricked into curiosity and speculation if Pilate had but a short conference with Herod—and a little group of humble men met in the deep dismay of their Master's death, and no one was interested but He who has confuted history by bringing to nought the things which are by the things which are not. When we accustom ourselves to consider the things that alone count, we see that history is that which will illustrate or explain the thoughts and feelings of the time, the movements of mind and heart and soul, the progress individual and social, the spiritual life of the age.

It is part of this insight into the true history of man, that we grow in understanding of the great experiences of the "cloud of



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witnesses," and grow in appreciation of the great literature that comes down to us. Much of the Bible is a dead letter to the surface optimist. The Bible is full of sorrow—the bitter cry of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, the cry of anguish over the injustice of the earth, the cry of dismay as the nation of promise staggered to her doom, the cry of the stricken heart at the loss of faith and love, the cry of penitence as the soul is convinced of sin and righteousness and judgment. These prophecies and psalms seem too tragic, and the language sounds exaggerated. We perhaps find an æsthetic pleasure in the pathetic cadence of a psalm or the solemn tragedy of a prophecy. We have had no experience that enables us to understand that it is more than literature. Until one day we know ourselves admitted into the ancient fellowship of sorrow, and the strong words are no longer outside of our experience and no longer above our



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needs. We learn how the ancient word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Bible becomes the book of comfort.

Luther said that he could not understand many of the Psalms till he had been afflicted. Intellectual appreciation came with spiritual insight, and spiritual insight was partly the fruit of sorrow born of a similar experience. Rutherford declared that he had found a new Bible through the furnace. He had had the Bible before, but it became precious to him in a new way. The experience is a common one. When we read some of the straits through which psalmists and prophets and saints of old came, when we feel the throb of anguish in the record left us, or even when we remember times in the history of the Church when the most pathetic and terrible of psalms could be applied to the actual situation, we are ashamed of our petty troubles and sorrows. We feel



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sometimes as if these psalms did not quite fit our case. They are too clamant, with too strident a note, and their pictures are too lurid. We can hardly apply the exact situation to ourselves. It is true that many a time we have reason to call for help in trouble. It is true that sooner or later grief comes to us, and seldom can a life pass without somewhere the sting of pain ; in times of conviction and repentance and awakening of soul we know a little of the loathing of sin ; but we can hardly make the whole picture our own. It may be that our lot has been cast in pleasanter places, as we certainly spend our days in more peaceful scenes, so that the music is too constantly in a minor key. Then, in some hour of need we are given to know, and the whole story is unsealed to us.

The fact is unquestioned that in pain countless lives have reached their highest, and that pain has driven a path of light

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into the soul. The death of a father has often been a revelation to many a son, as he realized that now he can no longer stand behind others, but must take his place in the front rank, in the firing line of life. He learns something of the burden the dear dead bore, and why there were furrows channelled on the face. The death of a child has sometimes been a revelation to a mother, enriching and enlarging the heart and giving a new tenderness because a new insight. The whole nature has expanded, and life has grown in gracious beauty. Often this transformation is evident even to the observer, but the heart itself knows more of what has been learnt in God's great school.

In the personal life a disappointment or privation is recognized as bringing with it a new force, and the way of pain is a way of insight. It comes in the very tone of the voice, and the whole way of looking at the world. In one of his letters, speak-



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ing of what pain has taught him, R. L. Stevenson says, "The rich fox-hunting squire speaks with one voice, the sick man of letters with another." The fox-hunting squire has no doubt his uses, but he has his limitations. He has nothing to tell us of the soul's secret and the vision of the unseen. There is a simple easy optimism of the untroubled life, which sounds hollow to the man who knows, and which is sometimes intensely irritating. Till we have been driven beneath the surface we do not know of what we are capable both of good and of evil, and we have false views of the world and of life. There are many things a man is shown, when the surface calm is ruffled. The song of the old harper in *Wilhelm Meister* moved the listening Wilhelm powerfully,

Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the darksome hours
Weeping and watching for the morrow,
He knows ye not, ye gloomy Powers.



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The heart-sick plaintive sound of the lament pierced deep into the soul of the hearer. The avenues of his heart were opened, so that old feelings were awakened in him, and new claims of sympathy roused. There are depths which are disclosed only to those who have paid the price. All others are mere outsiders, till they have been initiated into that region of deeper knowledge and deeper feeling.

It is the way to ultimate peace; for there is no permanent satisfaction in the mere surface life. There are men and women seemingly with everything the heart can wish, and yet the salt is out of their life. Life is full of interests and amusements: they are always doing something and going somewhere, but never do they find rest, and never can they use their rich and varied experience of happiness to deepen the world's life. They have never been awed by the thought that life is a sacred and solemn mystery. The voice of



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the rich fox-hunting squire may be very bright and pleasant, and it is sometimes good to hear the cheerful sound of that type, but it never touches chords of deep feeling like such words as those of the old harper.

After all, the great difference among men is a difference in insight and in the quality of appreciation. It is a commonplace to say that no two men really see the same scene alike. We are continually receiving instances of the fact that men's eyes are holden that they cannot see things in their fullness. As a matter of fact we do not see altogether with the eye, but with the heart. So that it is futile to set up faith and sight as opposites; for faith gives sight since it gives insight. Instead of saying that seeing is believing, it would be a deeper truth to say that believing is seeing. Sight is much more than the record of a self-recording optical instrument, and the fatal mistakes are more than mere errors in the instrument, errors



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of refraction of the light. It is not the eye that sees, but we that see by means of the eye, and if the mistake be in us, will it not vitiate everything we see? We only see what the heart gives us the power to see.

This is so in the world of nature. If some men can see in the colour and form of natural objects things which are hidden from our eyes, we are not justified in sneering and denying that they see them. A naturalist uttered a great truth in the remark that you must have the bird in your heart before you can see it in the bush. We can go through the world without having cultivated the sense of beauty, and even lose the gift of simple enjoyment. If all our thought of the earth is that objects have certain external qualities, and if we have never penetrated to any meaning, we are surely blind of eye and need some new vision.

Some whose eyes are open to Nature, to her beauty and truth, can see nothing



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of God in human life, in the pathos and tragedy of it, the disaster which treads on the heels of peace, the acts of devotion which rescue humanity from the grasp of selfishness, the nobility of soul which overcomes the craven and the mean, the possibilities which reach up to heaven and reach down to hell, and the divine love which works through all, giving to all meaning and purpose. Or again, we know how a disease of soul will corrupt every sense and mar every power. There is a moral obliquity of vision which can even go the length of calling evil good, and good evil—a terrible colour-blindness of the soul, where moral distinctions are obliterated and the eyes are holden that they cannot see the truth. If the pain of life can unseal the closed heart, it is worth while being learners in the hard school.

The insight that comes through pain and disappointment may be insight into



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the *value of what we have*. We learn to see not merely the many compensations, but also to see the great good in present blessings. It is often the happy and prosperous man, who talks loudly and largely over the misery of others, and makes large judgments on the injustice of the world and on the mystery of suffering. The man who has tasted for himself the bitter cup has often been shown something, which he thinks even worth the price. The outsider's partial observation leads to many a shallow judgment, whereas the man who has himself been through the experience can see something which makes him even thankful that he now knows.

There is much truth in the law of compensation, if it be a law. At any rate we can grasp the opportunity which lies in every seeming narrowing of opportunity, and turn a loss into a gain elsewhere. There is ever a way to make the most of an experience, like Wordsworth's Happy Warrior



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Who doomed to go in company with pain
Turns his necessity to glorious gain.

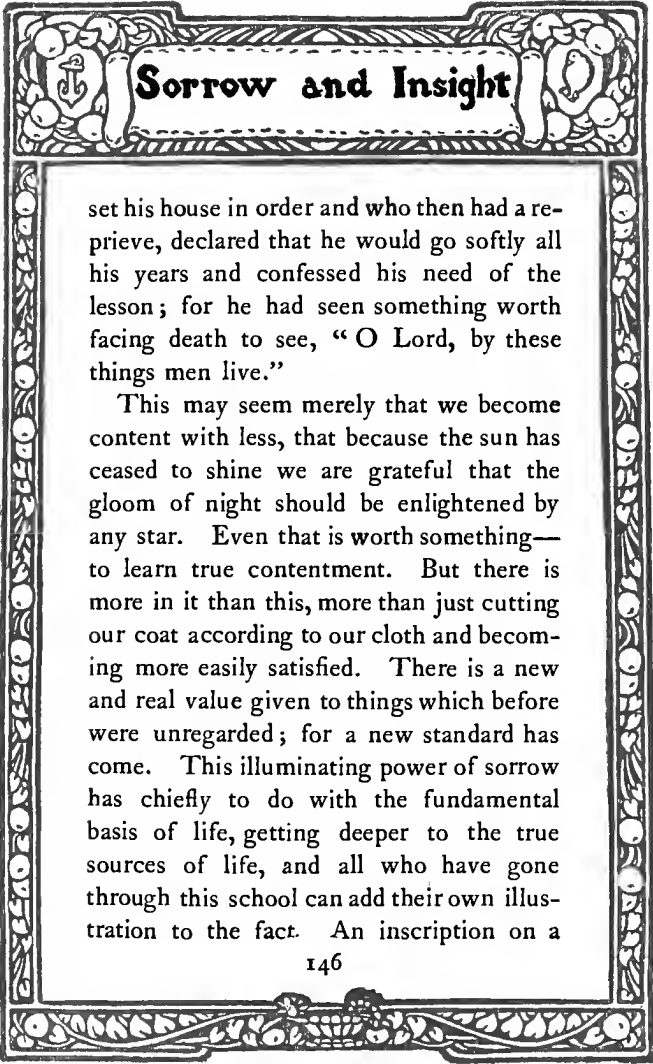
Men have looked their hard fate in the face and determined not to be mastered by it, and have found compensations of which they did not dream. They were driven to deeper sources for the satisfaction of their needs. A young man rejoicing in his strength has suddenly been crippled, and in the first dismay has felt himself at the end of all things, but has learned that he need not be the helpless victim of his calamity. It may be he has developed some gifts of his nature lying dormant, and has found some lasting joy in the things of the mind. Perhaps the man, who would have little else to show for his life than a little cleverness in baseball, has made himself a scholar. At any rate some new appreciations and new judgments of worth have become possible.

There may be a new joy in what is left,



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learning how precious some unregarded things really are. We often do not value things until we have tasted the dread of losing them. "Ye never ken the worth o' water till the well runs dry." We accept health and peace and love and service as a matter of course, and for the first time we learn how precious are these gifts when they seem taken from us. What revelations have come to men at sick-beds and death-beds! They never really saw what the best things in life are until then. In a flash of recognition they were shown some of the depths of life, the pathos and mystery and tragedy; and if love has been given back to them from the brink of the grave, they know ever after how good it was that they should have looked into the pit. Some answers are received to many a question, when suffering has been the schoolmaster. The world has been richer to a man ever since. The sick king, to whom came the peremptory command to



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set his house in order and who then had a reprieve, declared that he would go softly all his years and confessed his need of the lesson; for he had seen something worth facing death to see, "O Lord, by these things men live."

This may seem merely that we become content with less, that because the sun has ceased to shine we are grateful that the gloom of night should be enlightened by any star. Even that is worth something—to learn true contentment. But there is more in it than this, more than just cutting our coat according to our cloth and becoming more easily satisfied. There is a new and real value given to things which before were unregarded; for a new standard has come. This illuminating power of sorrow has chiefly to do with the fundamental basis of life, getting deeper to the true sources of life, and all who have gone through this school can add their own illustration to the fact. An inscription on a



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sun-dial at Santa Barbara in California reads, "The light of God showeth the way of life, but the shadow telleth both the hour and teacheth the faith." It is the shadow which marks the passage of the hours, and gives distinction to the shining of the sun.

The profoundest lesson is that which gives insight into the ultimate needs of life, and into the spiritual world which is our home. Often in days of peace and plenty, with the joy of work and the strength of friendship, with the pleasures of nature and art, we are content and happy in the present. The soul sleeps in its drowsy conditions, and accepts the transient for the permanent. We know in theory the truth of the great word that the world passeth away and the lusts thereof, but it has no effect on conduct. We do not live with any sense of detachment from things. When we are rudely shaken from our composure and we learn the un-



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stable equilibrium of life, and on what slight tenure we hold our dearest joys, we get the chance to learn the relative importance of things. A new insight becomes possible into the place of the spiritual, the value of character, and the beauty of goodness.

“What shall we do, Enobarbus?” Shakespeare makes Cleopatra ask in fear, when Cæsar is thundering at the gates, and the voluptuous queen is face to face with tragedy. Enobarbus replies solemnly, “Think and die.” There are times when men must think who never thought before, think of the past as it has been and now must be, its fatal doing which is the soul’s undoing now, think of the present bereft of all that life had, of the future which opens out its unknown path before trembling eyes. They must think of the meaning of life, its lost opportunities, its unfulfilled purpose. A clearer light dawns upon the eyes, and things are seen from another



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standpoint. Once and again we see from the standpoint of eternity, when no cross-lights of time come in to confuse. It may be an illness, when we are carried down to the end of the land, to the shore of life, and are set for a moment to look out over the strange water, where some time we must make our farewells and put out to sea. It may be a bereavement, when lives we loved drift out over that bar with the resistless tide, leaving us on the beach lifting impotent hands to the calm sky.

At such times we have confessed the value of the lesson, and have promised a different future if only we get another chance. We have at least been brought back from the careless security of our life to acknowledge dependence on God. This is surely the final end of all hard experience, that we should get insight into God's love and will. Charles Lamb wrote of a great sufferer, "She gave her heart to the Purifier, and her will to the Will that governs



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the universe." To have made such a submission is to have found the secret. We can well be grateful to have tasted of sorrow, if it has been the occasion of tasting of love. Too often we hold things as commonplace until our eyes are sharpened to see. We take the greatest gifts as a matter of course—even the gift of God's love. Sometimes we need to be "blinded with seeing tears until we see." We find that the men of insight are always the men, who have themselves graduated in this school. The fruitful lives are the lives into which the ploughshare has cut deep. Rutherford said, "I never knew by my nine years' preaching so much of Christ's love as He hath taught me in Aberdeen by six months' imprisonment." He had put it to the proof and had found new insight through his own pain.

In our dull eyes and shallow hearts there seems nothing marvellous in God's love; for the wonder has not kindled in



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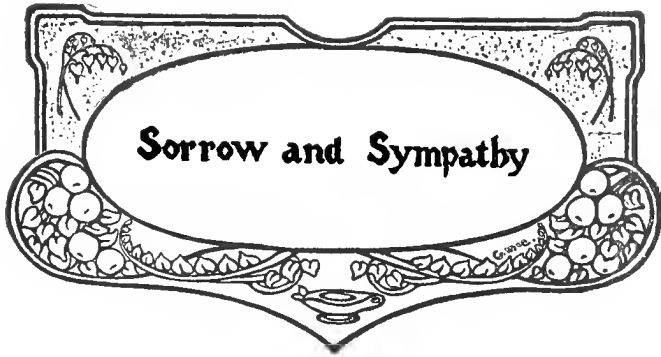
our soul, but when we know our sense of need and are driven to it in weakness and helplessness we get a new vision and are moved to make surrender. When we do, it is worth everything we have suffered, worth any price to learn that—even the price of all earthly joy. For, the tragedy is that a man should go to the grave untouched by the pathos of life, unmoved by its mysteries, never once awakened to the great facts in words we use so lightly, sin, repentance, sacrifice, forgiveness, love, having never once been broken by the sorrow of the world.

We must let the new insight become an inspiration to life. It should teach us to wear our possessions lightly. It is a terrible loss when men give their hearts to possessions, when living men are satisfied with things. As life gets narrower, it is only a call to make it deeper. As the outgoings of life seem cut off, we must enrich the sources from within. If the

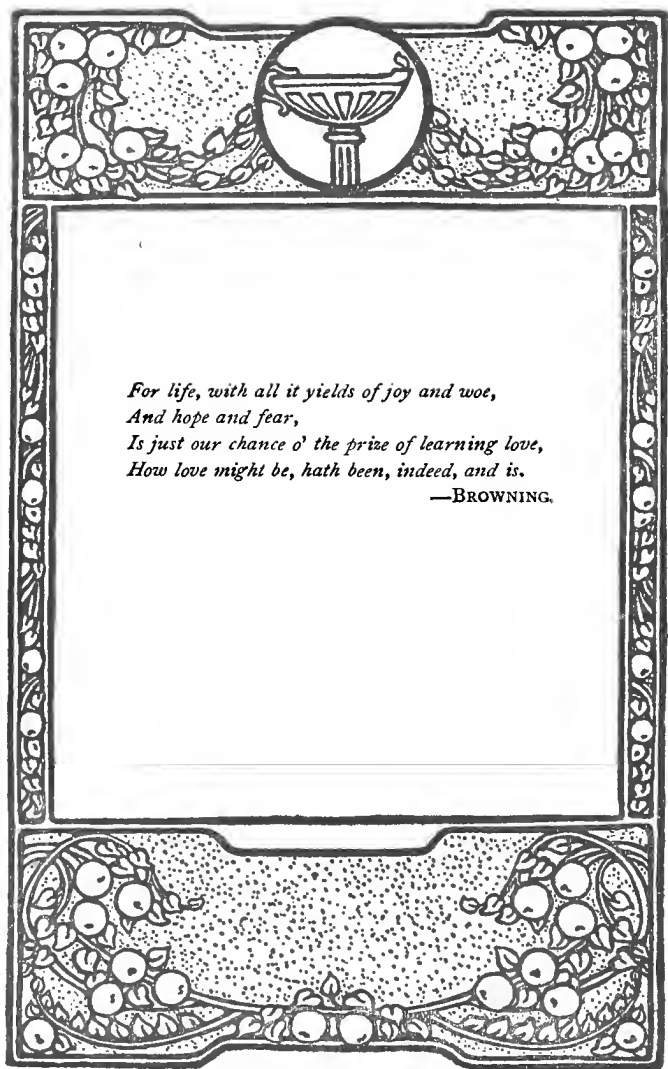


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enmity of men be our portion, we must love God only the more passionately and devotedly. If weakness comes, we must only be stronger in faith and let our heart gather courage. As sorrow or sickness or age brings detachment from earthly things, we must only cling more tenaciously to spiritual things, and pray for the insight into the will of God which sees it to be love, however high the price to be paid for the prayer's answer.



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*For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been, indeed, and is.*
—BROWNING.



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AS we have turned our subject round to the light, we have seen beauty and colour flash from every facet like a fine jewel, and perhaps the rarest beauty is this further suggestion that a great part of the function of suffering is the way it makes the whole world kin. One mission of pain undoubtedly is to move hearts, that otherwise would be hard and selfish, to the noble fellowship of consolation. Compassion and sympathy will unite men whom no argument would bring together, and these sweet graces are called forth by this very suffering which is our problem. Some will see a meaning here who are not attracted by the other uses we have considered, and to all of us it is one of the answers to the dark problem of human pain and sorrow. There is



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a true priestly function open to every son of man, and the training for it is by the sympathy which comes from knowledge. He must know what it is to be compassed about with infirmity, that he may have compassion on his fellows and bear gently with them. A beneficent end of suffering is to produce this gracious comprehension requisite for the highest social service.

In this, as in previous chapters, we are not seeking a simple formula which will give a complete solution of the mystery of grief. The lessons of life are as wide as life itself. A painful experience comes to each with its own meaning, and its own personal lesson, hushing one soul into patience, enlightening another with the knowledge of sin, pointing another to increased faith, softening still another to sympathy; and in all disciplining us to a larger reach of God. In this chapter we would consider 'one of these answers, which may find a response in some hearts,



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as they look back and see what God has done for them by the sore chastening of their lives.

We can begin with this accepted truth that experience alone completely teaches, that participation in a particular situation brings true comprehension of it, and so gives the divine capacity of sympathy. The priestly function can alone be exercised by a man from among men, who therefore knows men and can bear gently with them. There is a universal priesthood of man apart from anything official, a divine feeling for human infirmity, the glow of a heart that sorrows and joys because it loves. Nothing will teach this so powerfully as experience. The unerring appreciation of an event comes to the man, who himself has felt the force of it. Experimental knowledge is of the lasting sort, and the sort which brings comprehension. The world is made kin by a touch of nature, and nature teaches with



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irresistible force by facts. Actual community of sorrow or of joy will dissolve all conventionalities, when nothing else could. The recognition of nature's bond will then come in a flash, a gleam of intuition. It brings sympathy; and sympathy will unite men as no written bond could do, though it were attested and secured by every legal means. It is stronger than any deed of contract; for it is a compact written in flesh, and signed with blood.

A man must know himself before he can know men, and he must know them in this intimate sense before he can help them. One of the maxims of La Rochefoucauld is that we pardon in the degree that we love, but it is also true that we would love more if we knew more. A great deal of the hardness and cruelty of men is due to want of knowledge, lack of sensitiveness, want of experience of the same slights to which they subject others.



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So the typical oppressor, not only of the Bible but also of history, is the man whose heart is fat, who has lived a soft and prosperous life, the careless sensualist who is not in trouble like other men, nor plagued like other men, whose eyes stand out with fatness, and who has more than heart can wish—he it is who is compassed with pride as a chain, and covered with violence as a garment. The man who tastes of the bitter cup, who is broken and chastened and accepts it for his learning, loses his native pride and violence: pity and gentleness take their place.

Similarity of experience should breed sympathy. “He jests at scars who never felt a wound.” Whatever else may be taught, this lesson of sympathy ought to be learned from every experience of sorrow. Few of us can say that we do not need the lesson, if we know our own hearts, and know how easily they become selfish and shut up to all outside interests.



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So long as fortune smiles, so long as life flows smoothly on, so long as success and easy prosperity are our portion, we take a roseate view of the world. The considerate, compassionate temper does not come naturally with most. We soon become self-centred, careful of self, heedless of others. Sir Walter Scott, who had eyes for the great common facts of life, makes Jeanie Deans say in her sore trouble, "Alack! It is not when we sleep soft, and wake merrily, that we think on other people's sufferings, but when the hour of trouble comes." To how many of us sympathy was born of sorrow! If we had not known something of pain, our hearts would have been harder and more loveless than they are. We are dense and crass enough, with dull enough sensibility, but if it had not been for some discipline which perhaps only our own hearts know, we would have stood off from others with a colder, prouder isolation. The memory



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of a similar experience ought to make men considerate and pitiful.

It does not always do so, it is true. Indeed so many exceptions are there, that we are tempted sometimes to imagine that the opposite is the truth. A persecuted race or sect, who have tasted the bitterness of insolence and wrong, into whose heart the iron has entered, might have learned the beauty of tolerance from their own grievous lot. Yet how often rather when they have gained power, revenge has been the one thought. History is full of instances in which the persecuted have become persecutors in their turn. The lesson of tolerance has been learned by the noblest of them, but to the majority the memory of their wrongs has not made them gentle. Working men sometimes say that the hardest taskmasters are men promoted from their own class, and it is a proverb of Newgate that the reformed jailbird makes the severest jailor.



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The real truth is that sorrow in itself does not bring sympathy, and the hard blows of life do not naturally soften, and painful providence does not in itself lead to grace. Everything depends on how the pain and sorrow are met, just as every high priest, though all were taken from among men, did not show the true priestly quality of gentleness, but were sometimes proud and hard and haughty. At the same time the point is that community of experience can be used to learn a lesson, which could not otherwise be so completely learned. Pain can bring a softer look into the eyes that are schooled for the discipline. Sorrow can bring a deeper sympathy than was possible in the easy prosperous life. We feel the force of the beautiful appeal of Deuteronomy, "Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt"—ye know the heart of a stranger; ye have felt the bitterness and the anguish and the loneliness of it.

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All life is a great spiritual opportunity, and everything that emerges for us should be seized and the good of it appropriated ; so the sorrow, as well as the joy of life, has its own meaning. Of all the lessons of sorrow none lies so on the surface as this one of sympathy. Through it we get down to the common basis of life, the pit from which we are digged, the naked simple humanity which unites us. Often nothing else will teach the lesson to our stubborn hearts, and melt and move us to the way of love which is the way of God.

Pity and need
Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood
Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears
Which trickle salt with all.

But, as we have said, everything depends on the spirit in which grief is met. It must be used to enrich the life and enlarge the heart. An effort is needed ; for it is



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only an opportunity, and here as elsewhere opportunities may be missed.

To the Christian soul many a time a personal sorrow, or disappointment, or loss has been a turning-point of life, an occasion for deeper consecration and wider service. In Morley's *Life of Cobden* there is a quotation from one of John Bright's speeches, which explains how he was led to devote his life first of all to the corn-law agitation and so to many noble causes. "At that time I was at Leamington, and I was, on the day when Mr. Cobden called on me, in the depths of grief, I might almost say of despair; for the light and sunshine of my house had been extinguished. All that was left on earth of my young wife, except the memory of a sainted life and of a too brief happiness, was lying still and cold in the chamber above us. Mr. Cobden called upon me as his friend, and addressed me, as you might suppose, with words of condolence. After a time



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he looked up and said, 'There are thousands of houses in England at this moment where wives, mothers, and children are dying of hunger. Now,' he said, 'when the first paroxysm of your grief is past, I would advise you to come with me, and we will never rest till the Corn Law is repealed.' " That was chastening yielding its noble fruit, sympathy born of sorrow. John Bright's rich useful life might have been lost to England, if he had only brooded over his grief and hardened his heart, and refused to listen to the evident call which came to him. It is not in error therefore that we look for the ripest Christian character and the true priestly service from those who have lived most, felt most, even suffered most. There is no way to the higher reaches of life but the way of the cross.

We need not pretend to ourselves or to others that there is any solution in words to utterly explain the riddle of pain. It is poor work to try to patch grief with



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proverbs, to "charm ache with air and agony with words." We need not pretend that there is any philosophy of sorrow, which will make everything plain. But it can be said that we can use our pain or loss or grief or disappointment in a Christian spirit, and if we do, from the very heart of anguish joy is born, and on the withered stem a sweet white flower grows and in due time bears its peaceful fruit. When the garish light and crimson colour of summer have passed, the earth sometimes takes on a solemn sacred beauty. When the joy of life is buried, one day the grief also dies, and the heart understands; for it has been brought nearer God and nearer men. This is the priesthood of love and sympathy, where the follower of Jesus serves at the altar, himself sorrow-stricken, himself also a sin-bearer, offering the sacrifice of love. He shares in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings,—and His people's.



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This too is the quality of the Master's priesthood, of which the Epistle to the Hebrews is full. The Man of sorrow is the Man of sympathy. Though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things He suffered. The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. He drank of the cup of human life, and tasted what it is for a man to die. So, in the beautiful translation of our English Bible, He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is *Christus Consolator*, the pitiful, compassionate Saviour, because in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God; for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted. This is the secret of His power too; lifted up He draws all men to Him. We move to the passion of His Cross.



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The trouble with us is that we do not put this quality of sympathy in its rightful place of preëminence. Our whole standards of life are wrong, and we need to convince ourselves that this quality is first in importance before we see that it almost justifies any means that can produce it. Compassion or pity is sometimes looked on as almost a sort of weakness. We perhaps do feel that this element is needed to make a completely rounded character, but the world admires other qualities most, independence, energy, ambition, the qualities that make for success, the things that suggest strength. Compassion is looked upon as rather an additional thing, which can be graciously thrown in. With some it is even a mark of effeminacy, showing a strain of weakness. It is magnificent, but it is not war. It gives a touch of beauty to a character, but at the same time keeps it from reaching the topmost pinnacle of success. To be too much ex-



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cited by the sufferings or misfortunes of others, to be swayed by feelings of sorrow or pity, to show tenderness and sympathy for men's infirmities and troubles is to weaken oneself in the battle. The way to success is to be self-reliant and self-centred, even to be aggressive when occasion offers, and if there is a foot in the way to tramp on it.

Well, it all depends on what we mean by success. If by it we mean becoming the highest possible in character and life, we will see how important this quality is. It is this gentle strain which alone can save strength from brutality. The world's point of view is expressed in the false saying that pity is akin to contempt. The other saying is far truer that pity is akin to love, and without that there is no real success in human life. So important is this that there have been men who have seen the place of this quality to be so high that they have made it first, as Ruskin



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who makes it the one mark of a gentleman. Fine feeling, sensitiveness, insight into what others are experiencing represent the highest culture. It means sympathy, which is the imaginative understanding of other conditions.

Whether it be the mark of a gentleman or no, it is at least the mark of a Christian. The teaching of Jesus makes this a dividing line as in His parable of the Judgment. "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these." His whole life also could be summed up in the one phrase that He went about doing good. His sympathy and compassion were never failing. To heal the broken-hearted was His mission, and He called His followers to walk in His footsteps. The central fact of our faith is that God is love. The All-powerful is the All-loving too, so that if we look upon compassion as in some way a weakness we never were so alien to the very spirit of Jesus. He spoke of



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having compassion for the commonest wants of men. He was sorry on one occasion that they should be hungry, anxious that they should not go away fasting lest they faint in the way. He had compassion on the multitude, the common man and his common needs. From His point of view this quality of pity is not a gracious and pleasing adornment to character, but goes deep down and is the test of character.

We can see how this should be so, and must be so. There are many virtues we ask men to strive after and attain to, but by themselves they would be almost vices. Compassion is the crown of the virtues, because without it they all degenerate into more or less selfish possessions. The social value of all qualities and attainments comes from compassion, and the real value of any human gift is its social value. We may have a high ideal of strength of character, and may strive to add the great vir-



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tues of self-control and courage and truth and patience and honour, but when we have made the most of ourself in isolation if that were possible, nothing is permanently gained if what we are is not used in some way as a contribution to the world. Even spirituality by itself would simply live and die with a man, and make no impact on the life of the world without a point of contact such as is afforded by compassion.

There is no sense in this world as a whole, no rational meaning, if it is not meant in some way to be a place of discipline by which men are trained in moral life. To deny this is to put a fool's cap on the universe. And there is no sense in it, if the discipline is not meant to lead to and develop this very quality of sympathy. There are so many troubles and sorrows and cares, so many grievous things, so many straits and distresses, that if there be any moral meaning in life these things



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must be designed as opportunities for the cultivation of this crown of all the virtues. We need not look long, or far, for opportunities; they are scattered at our feet and meet us at every turn. Surely one of the lessons of all discipline for ourselves is that we should learn real sympathy. It broadens our appreciation and enlarges the heart. That is why we expect understanding from those who have been in the same situation and gone through the same experience. The considerate compassionate temper is expected from one who knows by experience. In *King John*, Shakespeare makes Pandulph complain to Constance, the mother of Arthur, "You hold too heinous a respect for grief," and she replies, "He talks to me who never had a son."

But this quality is not meant to stop at sympathy with mere similarity of experience. It is a spirit which grows in delicate appreciation, in thoughtful consid-



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erateness, widening out in circles till it is like the Master's own pity, taking on something of the colour of the divine compassion. It should become a quality of the complete character, so that if you make a cross-section anywhere you would find this a component part. We do not know life, until we see the *lacrymæ rerum*, the tragedy in daily life, the great pitiful maze of the world. We do not know the mind of Christ until we see why He said, and until we in some form can say with Him, "I have compassion on the multitude." It is the root of all true endeavour, the inspiration of all great service, the impulse to foreign missions, the spirit of all the Church's work. To look at the multitude in the streets of a city like the multitudinous waves of the sea, men and women and children with their pressing necessities and clamant needs, to look into their eyes and see where trouble lurks and care lies, to think of the pathos of it all is to load the



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heart with an intolerable burden. Yet, this is the source of the best service, social and religious. It is this that spurs the reformer, it is this that makes the preacher—to enter with imagination and sympathy into human need. The kingdom of heaven finds its best workers among the men who know a little of this compassion on the multitude.

The very real danger lies here however of leaving all this in the clouds, of making it a sort of sentimentalism, a fine feeling, a poetic passion, or even a pleasant luxury of pity. Compassion, if it is true, evidences itself in practical life. Sympathy is useless unless it leads to action. It must work itself into some sphere of service, if it is to preserve its freshness. It is good to be thoughtful over the vast problems of human needs, but to be of any value thoughtfulness must become helpfulness. If compassion be the mark of a Christian,



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it is not the sort that expends itself in empty feeling. "Inasmuch as ye have *done* it," or "Inasmuch as ye have *not* done it." We can look on the multitude as a mere multitude and brood with pitiful sadness over vague needs and sorrows, and the tender feeling we may pride ourselves on may become only morbidness. Vague sympathy with the masses does not exonerate us from our duty, where the units touch our own lives. The sentimentalist in the streets of the city may have no true feeling left for the individuals he knows best and meets most, at home, or at work, or in the other social relations of his life.

To be Christian, this wide compassion has to be individualized. If the love of God has so taken possession of our hearts that some of the quality of that love has become part of our character, it will find its natural outlet—for instance at home, which is often the hardest place to display heroism. It is a poor thing to have com-



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passion on the nameless multitude, and to have none left for those whose names we know. Some people make life miserable to themselves and turn the world into a second-rate hell for others, because they will overlook nothing and forget nothing. It is much even to have enough understanding and sympathy as to be able sometimes to shut our eyes, and shut our mouths. A petition in one of Robert Louis Stevenson's prayers written at Valima is, "Blind us to the offenses of our beloved, cleanse them from our memories, take them out of our mouths forever." It seems sometimes possible to have a general good-will to all with a particular kindness to none. If compassion is to prove itself, it can only be by actual kindness. If sympathy is sincere it must show itself somewhere in loving service. It is quite true that there are many difficulties and that often men cannot be helped in the only real way because they will not be



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helped, and even that many of the things designed for help may be only a hindrance, just as charity may be almost a curse. But that is because it is misdirected and is given without thought, often to save trouble.

What we need is consecration of what we have and what we are, looking upon life as given us for service. If we would fulfill the law of Christ, we must stretch out our hands and bend our necks for the burdens. It is this we need most of all to-day, if we are to have true social progress, and there can be no permanent progress which is not social, which does not register itself in the common life. It is this we need most if the work of the church is to be done, if the kingdom of heaven is to come—extensively in widening its bounds and in increasing its grip on modern life, and intensively in deepening faith and feeling. It is a sign of the unfaith of our time that this passion for men



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is not so conspicuous as it has sometimes been, and this passion for souls has died out of the Church's heart. It is when a man gives himself to save the world that he saves himself.

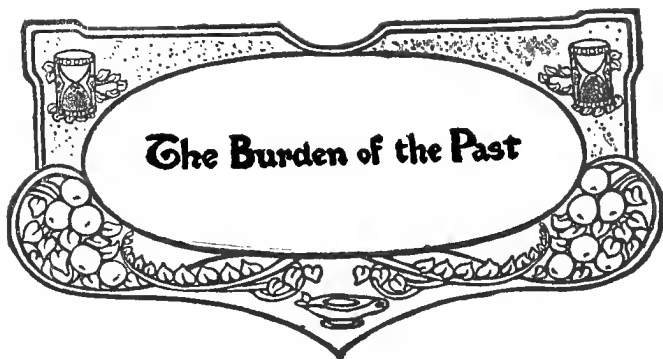
Above all, we must know that the way to true success is not the world's way. The highest place is due to those who show something of the kindness of God, something of the compassion which the Master displayed. "The servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle unto all." Alas for our earthly ideals and selfish ambitions! We honour and applaud the conqueror who rides to victory over strewn battle-fields, and the ashes of homesteads, and broken hearts. But not thus is the way to true success. By the revenge of time the secure place in the heart of the world is given not to the warriors, but to the saints whom the gentleness of God has made great. The Empire over souls is given not to the clever



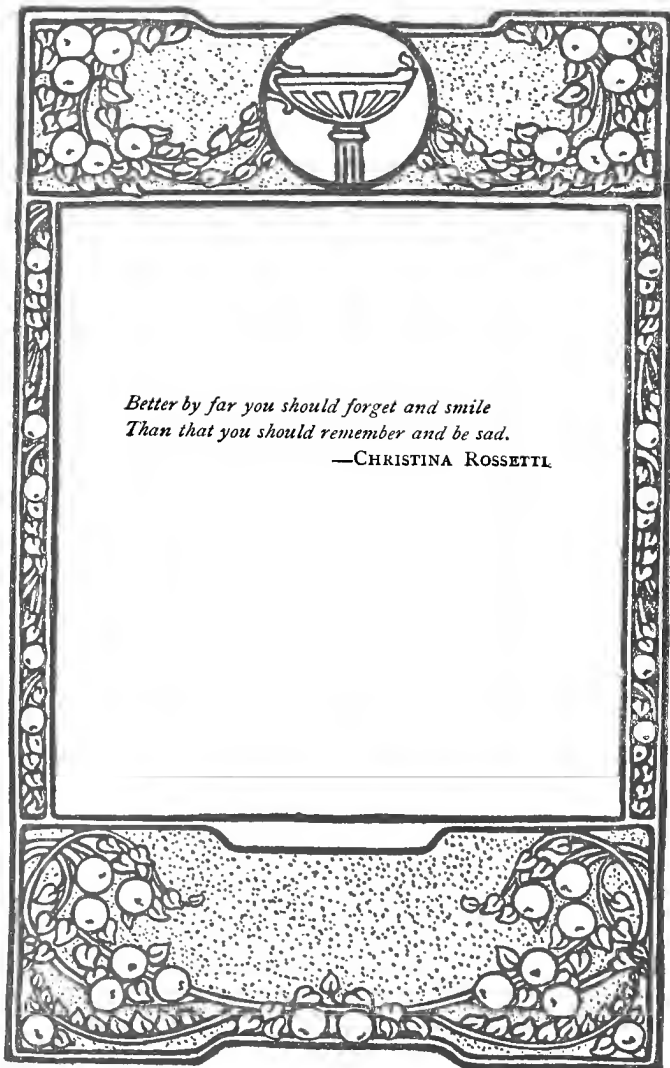
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and the strong, but to the loving, to those who move us by their unselfishness and their service. Men have climbed to power by many devious ways—Christ climbed to His power by the Cross. Is there any ideal like this priestly ideal—of a man from among men, gentle in his strength, strong in his gentleness, with compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way, lifting men by the love of his life nearer God? If we are to do the Master's work we must do it in the same way and in the same spirit. We must let His love kill in us all proud and insolent and exclusive thoughts.

Life has brought us nothing if it has not been seized by us as one vast opportunity for loving. If the world is in any way a place of discipline, then life must be an opportunity for service. This is to have caught God's secret, when we too have learned to love.

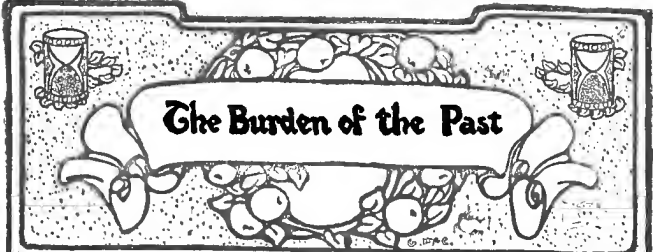


The Burden of the Past



*Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI



The Burden of the Past

TO many people the burden of the past is the heaviest burden of their lives. This is true even of many religious people, strange as it seems. No difficulties and trials of the present can match it for bitterness. They can see through faith some of the purpose of their heavenly Father in their present trials. They see something of the meaning of discipline, and can school their heart to learn. They know that His grace is sufficient for them, and in the strength of that they find it easy to bear even a heavy load. Their faith also is potent enough to lighten the burden of the future. They look forward calmly and hopefully to whatever the years may bring. Faith panoplies them against fate. They have no unworthy fears, no nervous anxiety



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about to-morrow. Even the valley of the shadow has little terror for them, believing that they will be shepherded through that to the eternal fold. Yet they, to whom the burden of the present and the burden of the future are so little, are often weighted by a sore burden of the past. They are hag-ridden by shadows of dead days.

Sometimes it is the very greatness and success and joy of the past which induce this constant recollection. To men of a certain temperament there is a temptation to live too much in the past, and so to weaken life for the duties of to-day. In reviewing times that are gone, memory has a hallowing power, setting things in a soft and tender light. Thus, it is a common infirmity of old age, though it is not confined to old age, to glorify the past, and to think that the former times were better than these. It is often a harmless sentiment, but it carries with it a very real



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temptation which robs life of its full power.

The sore burden of the past, however, which weighs upon the heart is not the recollection of some joy or success of the past, but of some failure, some sorrow, some loss, some sin, or some shame. To many, who live ever under the shadow of this memory, it would mean new life, if the promise came to them with the meaning it had in the prophet's lips, "Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember thy reproach any more."

Of course, there is a sense in which we cannot forget, and we are not meant to forget. Experience has its lessons to teach; and everything that happens to us leaves its mark, which it is folly for us to cover up till at least we understand the markings. There is a levity of mind, a childish thoughtlessness, which takes no account of what happens, and which finds



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It easy to forget ; for there is not depth in the mind for events to leave any mark. It is not any such levity, a light-headed shallow enjoyment in the present, which can be set forth as an ideal.

The appeal to the past is very powerful, and rightly so. Nothing will so move a man like it. When all else seems to fail, memory will drive a man to his knees. Somewhere in the hardest heart there is a soft spot where the arrow of conviction can strike and quiver. Some men are saved by the hope of a Paradise in front of them : others are saved by the memory of a Paradise lying behind them. The soul that has such a lost Eden of the past can never escape the appeal of it, pleading, accusing, entreating, condemning. There are no waters of Lethe, which by drinking will bring complete forgetfulness of the past. Memory sleeps, can be lulled and soothed till oblivion comes, but it does



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not die. In a moment it can awaken. An incident, a word, a gesture, an idle thought can bring back a forgotten scene as by a wizard's wand. It recreates itself before us: the solemn pageant passes in front of our eyes. We may forget what are called facts, the pieces of information which we dignify by the name of knowledge, but that which we passed through and experienced, our vital thoughts, our affections, the things that made their mark upon our life and have become part of ourselves—these we can never forget.

There is no defense against memory. No man is safe from a possible resurrection of the past. Thackeray, moralizing about some of the relics excavated from Pompeii at present in the Naples Museum, with the preacher's instinct which never really left him, turns the subject to search the very heart of man, "Which of us that is thirty years old has not had his Pompeii? Deep under ashes lies the Life



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of Youth,—the careless Sport, the Pleasure and Passion, the darling Joy. You open an old letter-box and look at your own childish scrawls, or your mother's letters to you when you were at school; and excavate your heart. Oh me, for the day when the whole city shall be bare, and the chambers unroofed, and every cranny visible to the light above!" It is because we are spiritual entities, with a life all our own, with a past all our own, that this is possible. Remorse is only remembrance: awakened conscience is only awakened memory: repentance is only recollection: self-reproach is only self-knowledge. We can never get away from ourselves, and that is why we can never get away from the past.

All religion begins with repentance, and the appeal to repentance is an appeal to memory. To remember is the ethical method of all ages, probing men to the roots of life, laying bare the springs of motive, revealing the secret things to a



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man's own astonished soul, tearing his very heart with the despair of memory. Not by any easy facile optimism can true peace and true forgetfulness be achieved. The gate of repentance stands at the entrance of the way of life, and repentance implies the very terror of remembrance, godly sorrow for the past, an enlightened conscience reviewing all that has gone, till the heart is sick, and would give the world for a nepenthe that could bring oblivion. This burden of the past, which is the burden of moral existence, cannot be relieved by merely turning the back on what is uncomfortable to think about, and concerning oneself with the details of present life.

The sins and faults of youth have a trick of reappearing, pale ghosts of the past that will not be laid. Forgotten things start up to recollection without warning. It is one of the ways in which conscience works, reminding us that we are each one



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individual, with personal responsibility, with unbroken continuity, with a life that is seamless, woven at one loom. Everything that we have done, and been, has had something to do with the making of us. It has entered into the fibre of our being, and we only need to excavate deep enough to find traces of it. As in a geological formation, new strata of thought and feeling and experience have been accumulated upon it and have hidden it from view, but it is there with its story to tell like the old red sandstone. Acts organize themselves into habits; habits organize themselves into character; and character is destiny written in brief. The dust of time only covers, but does not obliterate, the deep marks on the heart which every life receives.

At the same time, men often carry needless burdens which are a heritage of their past. These burdens are of all sorts, and



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what would be a light weight to one man is to another an almost intolerable load. This is why general consoling counsels, and the scraps of proverbial philosophy so commonly dished out for comfort, are so useless and sometimes so irritating. Shakespeare's ironic remark is true to experience, "Every one can master a grief but he that has it." Temperament plays such a large place even in deciding what our burdens shall be and how hardly they shall press on us. A disaster or disappointment will cast on some lives a shadow that remains to the end. The ingratitude of a friend, the loss of property, the disappointment of an ambition, the memory of a mistake, even of a foolish speech, will rankle in some minds and reappear in sleepless nights. A sense of shame or disgrace has broken many a heart, when a coarser grained nature would have easily recovered.

It is a lack of insight into the real



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griefs of men to despise such sorrows, and to look upon the bearers as unmanly. There is often something incomprehensible to outsiders about some lives that are sad for no evident reason. The underlying sadness, for example, of the life of Robertson of Brighton is difficult for a reader to understand. He had great gifts and used them greatly, achieved a great career with ever-widening influence, seemed to have everything to make him happy in his home and his work, and yet the impression of melancholy pervades the record of his life. The sin and sorrow of the world lay heavily on his soul, and the fine sensitiveness of his nature partly explains the pathetic tone, but his letters are full of the feeling of loneliness and of half-suppressed complaints against his lot. It has sometimes been suggested that he never got over the disappointment of his first ambition to be a soldier, and that he judged everything in his successful career by the

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imaginary happiness he would have had in the profession of his own choice. Whether this is any explanation in Robertson's case or not, undoubtedly many men let some similar disappointment darken much of their life. Certain doors once open to them are closed, and imagination pictures to them all that they have lost, till the good of the present is contemned.

The path of wisdom is surely to acknowledge limitations, and to recognize that there are some losses that cannot be repaired and some chances that can never be regained. The loom of life weaves out the web, and after a time there is no going back to gather up dropped stitches. The web must remain with its flaws. When Goethe wrote the Second Part of Faust he remarked that the man who had written Part I was dead. There are some mistakes that cannot be retrieved and some steps that cannot be retraced, and it is good to accept the fact. There comes a



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time when a wise man realizes that a new career is denied him, and that he must be content with the work and position he has attained. The young man facing life has before him many alternatives even in the matter of the kind of work he will do, but it does not take long before he realizes that the alternatives have begun to dwindle, till after some years of work he must go on with his choice if he is to make anything of his life at all. The Unjust Steward, when the prospect of losing his situation was before him was only stating a fact of experience when he said, "Dig I cannot; to beg I am ashamed." The more special a man's work is, the more doors have been shut against him if he would seek other work.

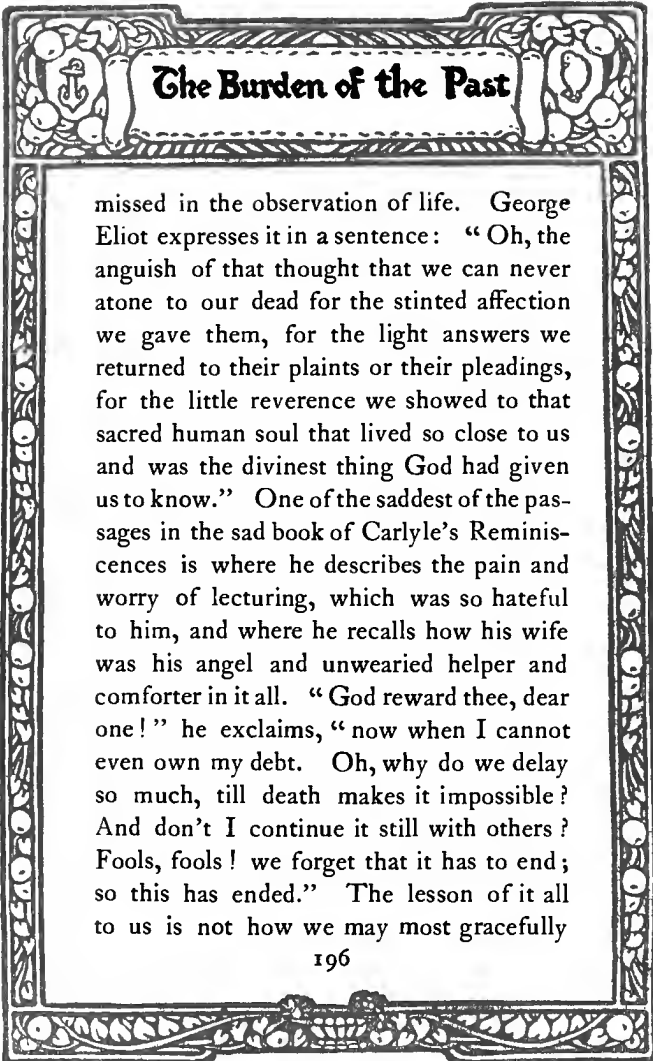
There are even sterner limitations still. There are things that bring before us in even more drastic manner our lost occasions and the irreparable past. Think of the doors that death shuts, for example.



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“It is the bitterest element,” says John Morley, “in the vast irony of human life that the time-worn eyes to which a son’s success would have brought the purest gladness are so often closed forever before success has come.” We may, however, have bitterer thoughts in the presence of death than even that. We may know something of the remorse of lost opportunities, which can never come to us though we seek with tears. Death closes doors not only for the dead, but for some of the living. It may be that we would fain show some of the love we felt but never expressed, lavish tenderness on the dear head, or sob repentance to the gentle soul, but the door is shut which no man can open.

This burden of remorse is one of the heaviest of all to carry, and many a life is darkened by unavailing regrets. It has been expressed again and again by the masters of literature; for it could hardly be



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missed in the observation of life. George Eliot expresses it in a sentence: "Oh, the anguish of that thought that we can never atone to our dead for the stunted affection we gave them, for the light answers we returned to their plaints or their pleadings, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us and was the divinest thing God had given us to know." One of the saddest of the passages in the sad book of Carlyle's Reminiscences is where he describes the pain and worry of lecturing, which was so hateful to him, and where he recalls how his wife was his angel and unwearied helper and comforter in it all. "God reward thee, dear one!" he exclaims, "now when I cannot even own my debt. Oh, why do we delay so much, till death makes it impossible? And don't I continue it still with others? Fools, fools! we forget that it has to end; so this has ended." The lesson of it all to us is not how we may most gracefully



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mourn our lost opportunities, but how we may buy up our new ones with the avidity of a merchant keen on a gainful purchase.

There are worse griefs even than the absence which death creates, when love misses the object of affection. At the death of a little boy dearly loved and missed by his parents, a friend of the family uttered in that even tone of voice, more affecting than tears, a sentence which has remained with me as the saddest I have ever heard from mortal lips. "I had two boys," he said, "and I wish I had seen them carried out in their coffin as this little lad is carried." What could be said before grief like that, when the empty seats in a house meant dishonour worse than death? Before death there are some things that may fitly be said, sometimes wondrous consolations in happy memory if nothing else. But when the seat is empty and every thought of it brings shame as well as sorrow, the iron surely enters the heart



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deeper than any other blow of fate could drive it.

All problems pale before the problem of sin; all burdens are light compared to it. The power of Christianity lies in the fact that it is the gospel of forgiveness. There could be no real comfort in the face of the most desolating evil of life if this were not so. Only the revelation of God can suffice to staunch the inward wound, that otherwise would not cease to bleed till death. There are sorrows that have no cure, if it be not found there. The world is renewed by the renewal of the soul, and nothing else can do it. Men and women whose lives have been wrecked by betrayal or made forlorn by bereavement, or whose hearts have been stained by sin and shattered by remorse, have no place of refuge and of repair if not in the Eternal Love. It is to be feared that many think of the divine forgiveness as a smaller and poorer

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thing than human forgiveness. They never seem to think that God's forgiveness can be as full and free and gracious as their own. They do not seem willing to open their hearts to the good news. Some at least, who believe in the forgiveness of sin and accept the Father's love, are yet ever oppressed by some shadow of the past. They are still weakened by the old sorrow, or haunted by the old shame, or burdened by the old sin; and have never realized the completeness and the power of the Love they claim as theirs.

It is true that something has departed utterly and forever. There is no magic to turn back the irrevocable years, no miracle to restore what the canker-worm has eaten. It is true that the past cannot be altogether undone, cannot be just as though it had never been. Many men who have emerged out of the struggle into peace, and who are not tormented any more by despairing remorse, have still the



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sad feeling that they are not what they might have been, that they are not the fine, true, perfect instrument for God's purpose they would have been but for the evil past. Even when good now reigns supreme in the heart, to many a man the past has ruined the instrument for good their lives might have been; and the sting has not quite been taken out of the past so long as they feel they must

stand as mute
As one with full strong music in his heart
Whose fingers stray upon a shattered lute.

It must not be stated in terms of an unmoral fatalism, breeding a cureless despair both of the past and of the future. But while it is true that a new life is open to all, and that new hope can flood with joy the heart that before was broken with despair, still the old life is not given back to be lived over. Repentance can bring forgiveness of sin. The past can be buried,



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its sorrow forgotten, and its shame covered up, but sin forgiven can never be the same as sin uncommitted. Many a man knows to his cost that he is weak where he might have been strong, that qualities in him are languid which should have been vigorous, that his character is poor in places where it might have been rich.

The Christian faith is a tacit condemnation of the sentimental brooding on the past, whatever that past may be, which weakens the present life, which keeps a man from gathering up the fragments of his life that remain, from doing his duty calmly, and giving himself to whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report. In the Christian life, St. Paul tells us that progress towards perfection is attained by forgetfulness of the past. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are before, I press towards the goal." It does not mean, as we have seen,



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that we should forget everything, the blessed hallowed memories which are our best angels still, the events and passages of our pilgrimage. Some of the sorrow of the past we cannot rid ourselves of, and some of its joy clings about us like sweet perfume. We are expected to remember the lessons of the past, both of failure and success, of sorrow and joy, of moral defeat and victory.

The principle is a simple one. All that would hinder us from running the Christian race, all that would impede, must be put behind us as we bend to our present tasks and face our future. The past must not be a burden which clogs and weights us at every step. Indulgence in the retrospective, self-complaining, self-accusing temper must be seen to be a temptation. If we believe in the eternal love of God, we must not let any spectral figures of the night chill our blood and keep us from our pilgrimage.



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There are other temptations which may be the heritage of our past. One is when sorrow becomes exacting and selfish, heedless of present duty in a sort of luxury of grief. The depressed life can make itself very depressing to others. Sometimes a mourner has sacrificed the living to the dead. To give way to morbid memories and sentimental sorrows is to lose the great opportunity. In the first shock of an acute sorrow or a sharp awakening it often comes as a blinding influence, darkening all the world and embittering all life. It looks as if the sorrow will never recede into the past and the wound will never heal. With some it turns into a bitter silence expressed in Byron's lines,

All that the proud can feel of pain
* * * * *
Which speaks but in its loneliness,
And then is jealous lest the sky
Should have a listener, nor will sigh
Until its voice is echoless.



The Burden of the Past

If sorrow does not illumine, it darkens; if it does not humble, it stiffens into pride. Tears can wash the eyes and the heart, and let the soul see clearly through the cleansed windows of sense. But there are some who cannot see God for tears, who are blinded and stunned by hot grief, and who only ask to be let alone in their misery.

The needs of life remain, no matter what the past contains, and while there is life there is need. Fortunately all cannot afford to indulge in much luxury of woe, and life drives men to duty, which itself teaches a lesson of faith. In *The Antiquary* Scott enforces this truth of common life in the scene where Oldbuck goes down to express sympathy with the fisher family who had lost a son. It was immediately after the funeral, and he was surprised to see the fisherman mending his boat on the beach. "And what would ye have me to do," answered the fisher



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gruffly, "unless I wanted to see four children starve, because ane is drowned? It's weel wi' you gentles, that can sit in the house wi' handkerchers at your een when you lose a friend; but the like o' us maun to our wark again, if our hearts were beating as hard as my hammer."

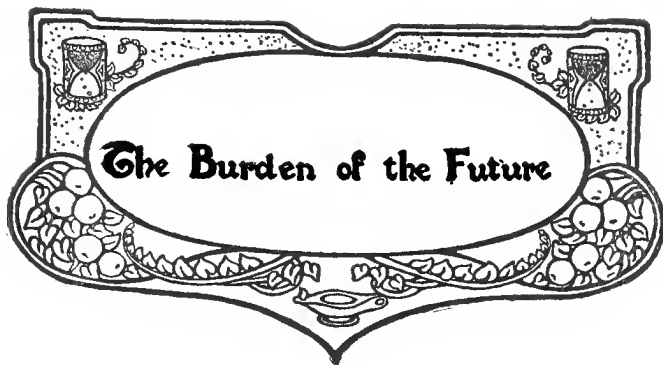
If sorrow weakens us, if it is not making us truer and stronger, we must forget it. We need not forget the love which was ours and which we have lost, but we must forget what of self is in the sorrow, which hinders us from present duty. If we believe in God, the memory of our love should inspire us, and teach us not to look backward for it but forward. All true love is there, to be found again in God. If even sin, the shame of youth, the reproach of the past, weakens us, if it is not bracing us to redeem the time, we must forget it. This is the good news, the gospel of forgiveness, without reserve; freeing the soul from the past,



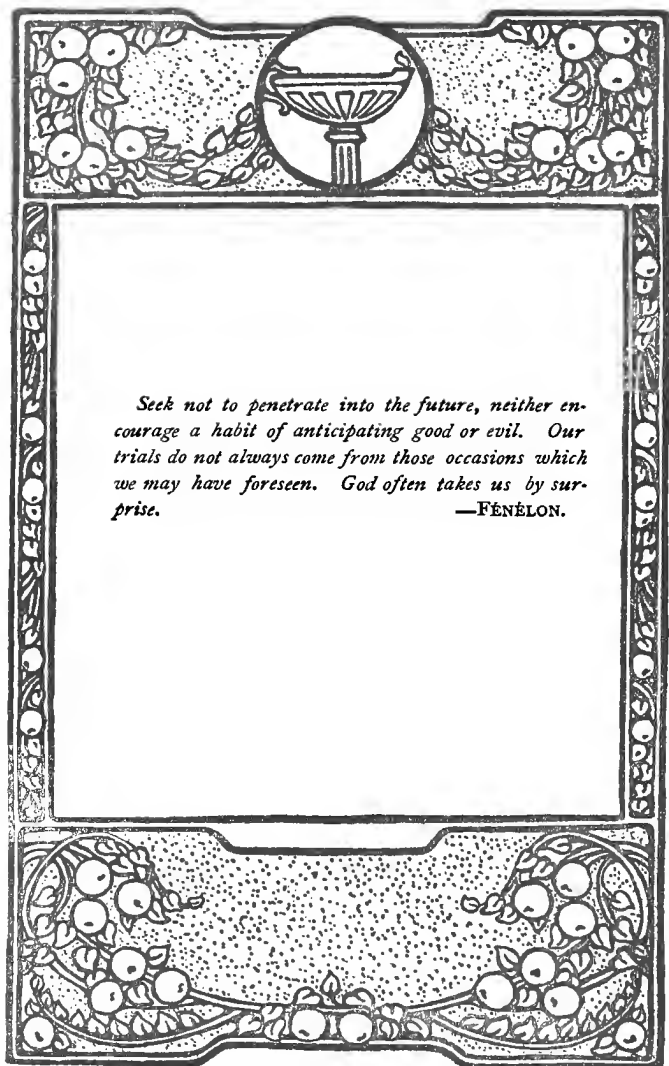
The Burden of the Past

from the thralldom of the things that are behind. It is pagan teaching that sin is in-expiable, and must hang on us till the end, and shroud life with its blackness.

We need not fear that this Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sin will make sin easy: it is the only thing that can make sin impossible, the light that drives out the darkness, the love of God that fills the heart and leaves no room for evil. We must forget what God has forgiven. We must forget all that hinders, as we press towards the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.



The Burden of the Future



Seek not to penetrate into the future, neither encourage a habit of anticipating good or evil. Our trials do not always come from those occasions which we may have foreseen. God often takes us by surprise.

—FÉNELON.



The Burden of the Future

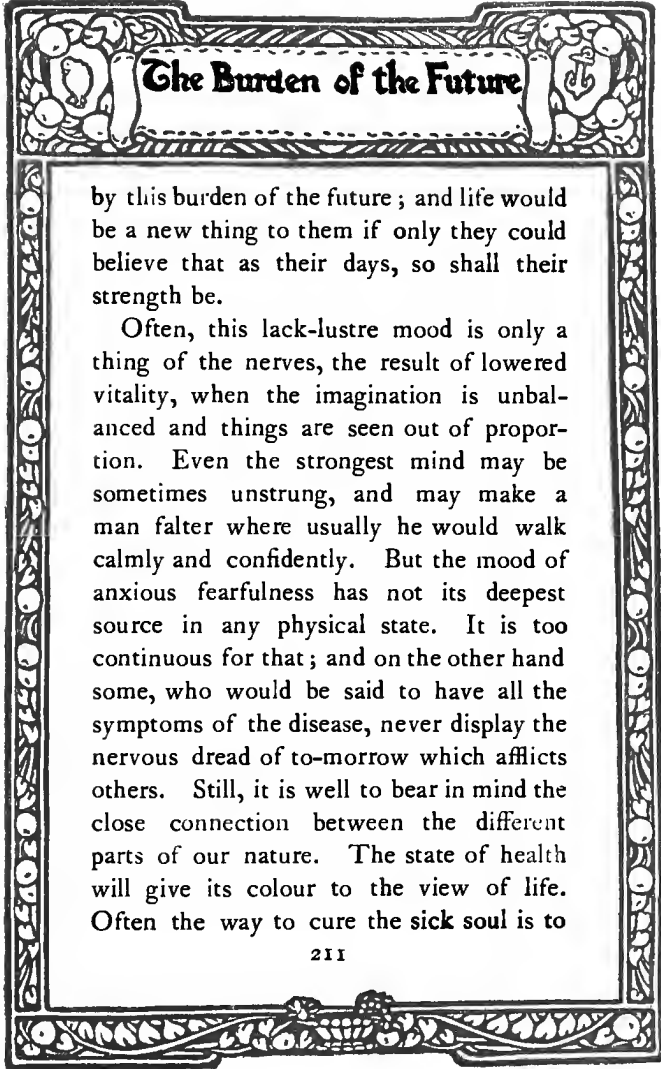
TO many the burden of to-morrow is harder to bear than the burden of to-day, however heavy it may be : life is darkened by the shadow of the future. Even many religious people live perpetually under this leaden sky, never completely and whole-heartedly rejoicing in the sunshine which is theirs. Their peace is destroyed by vague fears of the future, and their lives are poisoned by petty cares and anxieties. Many, to whom the burden of the past and the burden of the present are little, are oppressed by this burden of the future. They accept the love of God for their past, believing in His gracious pardon of sin ; and so the past has lost for them its keenest sting. They believe in the Father's sustaining help for the present : under trial they know themselves



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to be upheld by their faith in God's loving providence. But they are dogged by a vague, overshadowing fear of the future, all the more terrible because it is vague. It does not shape itself into definite form, but looms large and undefined, a black storm-cloud that may burst at any moment.

It may be an accumulation of little fears and cares about our future and the future of those we love, a depressed state of nervous anxiety. It may be a mistaken prudence, which wants to provide for every possible eventuality, and which yet feels that there are always loopholes where chance can creep in and spoil the best laid plans. It may be an undue estimate of the value of the material in human life, laying too much stress on the means of living. Or even this fearfulness may appear to have a religious source, and be caused by a keen desire that the kingdom of heaven should come quickly. Whatever be the particular cause, many hearts are crushed



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by this burden of the future ; and life would be a new thing to them if only they could believe that as their days, so shall their strength be.

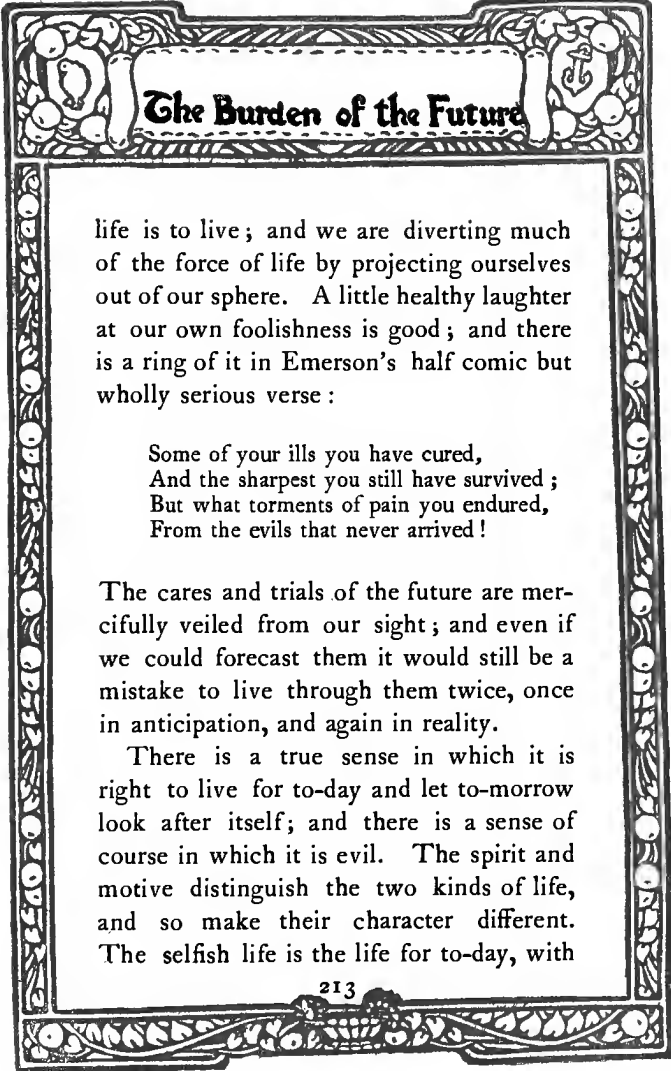
Often, this lack-lustre mood is only a thing of the nerves, the result of lowered vitality, when the imagination is unbalanced and things are seen out of proportion. Even the strongest mind may be sometimes unstrung, and may make a man falter where usually he would walk calmly and confidently. But the mood of anxious fearfulness has not its deepest source in any physical state. It is too continuous for that ; and on the other hand some, who would be said to have all the symptoms of the disease, never display the nervous dread of to-morrow which afflicts others. Still, it is well to bear in mind the close connection between the different parts of our nature. The state of health will give its colour to the view of life. Often the way to cure the sick soul is to



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find the secret of the sick body, and conversely mental states react on bodily conditions.

The mere habit of living ahead, and nursing a sort of melancholy, brooding over the possibilities of fate, is a habit as vicious as any other bad habit. Presentiments of evil often come true, because they lay open to the evil. We only need to think a moment, to see how foolish and futile it is to exist in a constant anticipation of evil. To imagine evil and cower before some unknown future blow is foolish; for even if it is to come we do not know where the blow will fall. Our worst difficulties do not meet us at the expected places or at the foreseen times. It is almost a proverb that it is the unexpected that happens, and the future when it comes often takes us by surprise as we discover that the rough places are smooth. Many a dreaded day vanishes when we come up to it in courage. The object of



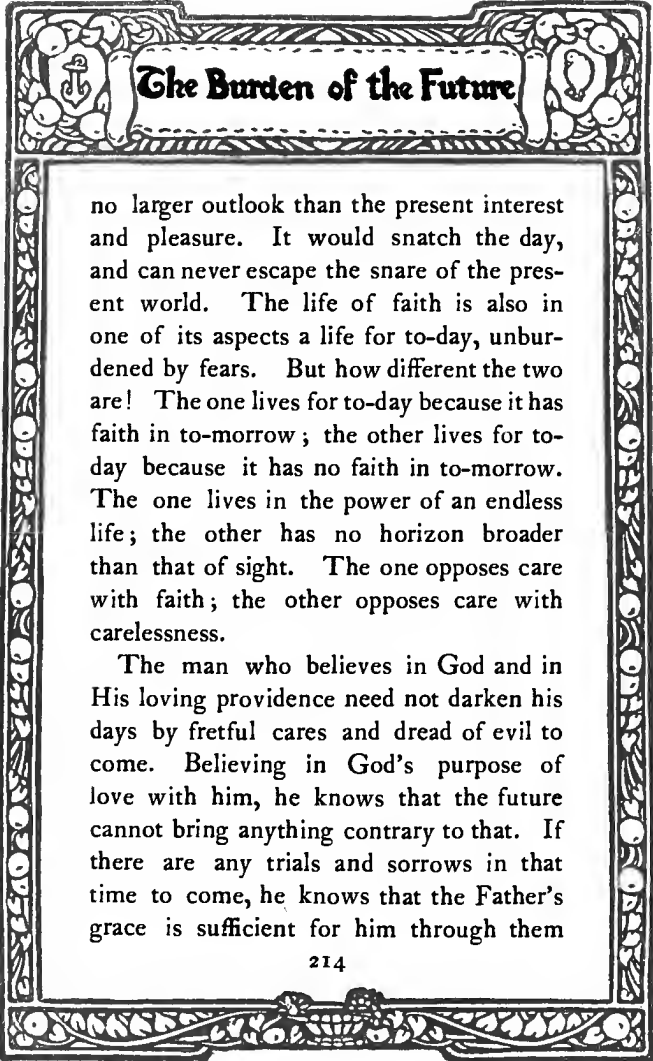
The Burden of the Future

life is to live ; and we are diverting much of the force of life by projecting ourselves out of our sphere. A little healthy laughter at our own foolishness is good ; and there is a ring of it in Emerson's half comic but wholly serious verse :

Some of your ills you have cured,
And the sharpest you still have survived ;
But what torments of pain you endured,
From the evils that never arrived !

The cares and trials of the future are mercifully veiled from our sight ; and even if we could forecast them it would still be a mistake to live through them twice, once in anticipation, and again in reality.

There is a true sense in which it is right to live for to-day and let to-morrow look after itself ; and there is a sense of course in which it is evil. The spirit and motive distinguish the two kinds of life, and so make their character different. The selfish life is the life for to-day, with



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no larger outlook than the present interest and pleasure. It would snatch the day, and can never escape the snare of the present world. The life of faith is also in one of its aspects a life for to-day, unburdened by fears. But how different the two are! The one lives for to-day because it has faith in to-morrow; the other lives for to-day because it has no faith in to-morrow. The one lives in the power of an endless life; the other has no horizon broader than that of sight. The one opposes care with faith; the other opposes care with carelessness.

The man who believes in God and in His loving providence need not darken his days by fretful cares and dread of evil to come. Believing in God's purpose of love with him, he knows that the future cannot bring anything contrary to that. If there are any trials and sorrows in that time to come, he knows that the Father's grace is sufficient for him through them



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all. If there are temptations, he knows he will not be tempted above what he can bear. His times are in God's hands. If his days are to be long, the more time to worship and to witness. If they are to be few, the greater need to redeem the time now. If they are to be lived through much tribulation with darkness and storm, with a long stretch through the valley of the shadow, the Shepherd of his soul is ever with him. He will ask to see the heart of good in every evil that touches his life, the joy that slumbers in every pain, and in the hour of the final passion will commit his soul to God. He must believe that as his days, according to the measure of them, according to the character of them, according to what in them he is called to endure, so shall his strength be. Pascal sums up what may be said about the true religious way of taking short views of life, "Here, therefore, our thoughts and studies should principally be



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engaged: yet the world is generally of so restless a disposition, that men scarcely ever fix upon the present, nor think of the minutes which they are now living, but of those which they are to live. Thus we are always in the disposition of life, but never in the act."

There is, however, a real practical difficulty due to the fact that we are compelled to consider the future. The world is a place in which foresight and vigilance are necessary. Life is so organized that it is a duty for us to exercise prudence and forethought. The weakest sort of character is that which never considers the future, never takes results into account. The lack of ordinary prudence is responsible for many of the evils, which have assumed gigantic proportions and have become even a social menace. One of the elements of despair in our modern society is the man who will take no care for the future, who



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drifts with the tide and lives in a happy-go-lucky fashion from hand to mouth, without forethought, seemingly without any anxiety for himself or for those dependent on him. It means that he has no seriousness of purpose and that he has shuffled off any responsibility for the future.

On the other hand the man of prudence with wise judgment is one of our great social assets. He becomes a leader in industry, in politics, and in all regions of social activity. The business man, who does not consider possibilities and weigh probabilities and anticipate events and calculate future results, it is safe to prophesy, will not be long in business. The true statesman also has to be quick to read the signs of the times, to read beforehand what is likely to happen, to see the shadow of coming events, and to form his plans accordingly. In ordinary life also, in the wise conduct of our own affairs, we need to exercise forethought and to consider the



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morrow. Indeed, this is part of the moral training of life, and true prudence means discipline, self-denial to-day in the interests of the future. It is obvious that there is a living for the present which is only selfishness.

Yet there is a sin of anxiety and fear, of overcarefulness, which is due to a lack of real faith. Nothing brings so much misery to a man as this state of fear. No burden is so heavy as this burden of the morrow. The man who is always calculating, always estimating future chances, lives in a state of disquiet. It is not only that so much of it is unprofitable, and that so many of his inferences and calculations are useless, but that it is often positively evil. Life itself is lost in anxiety over the means of living. If we think of all the possible evils that may happen to-morrow, if we give way to all the misgivings about the future, if we are full of nervous anxiety about ourselves and others,



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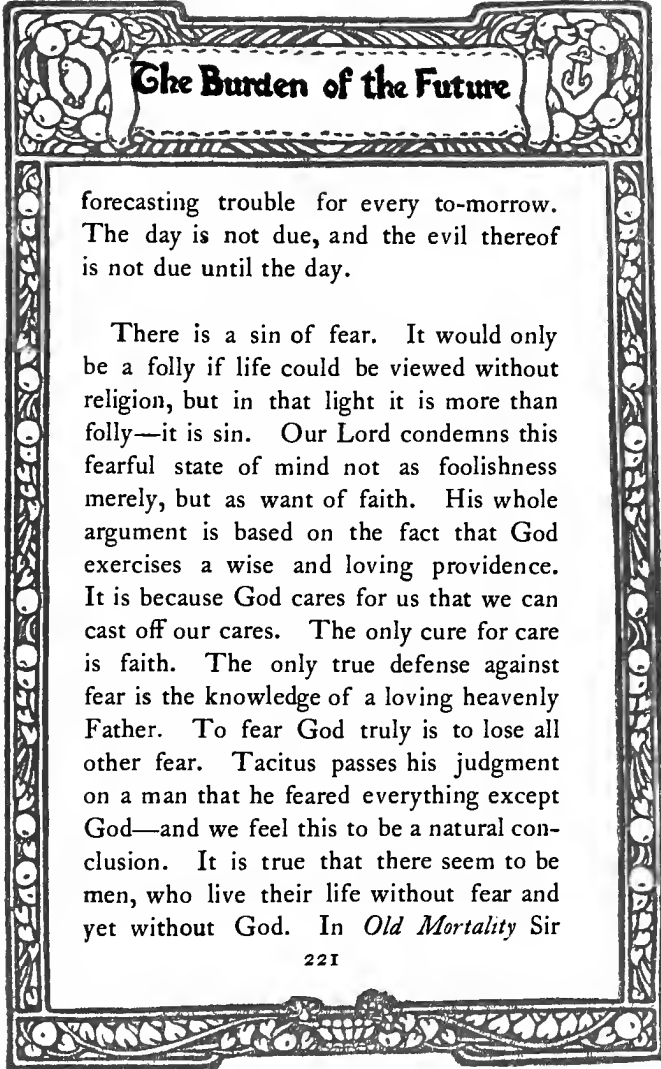
of a surety we are in for a great deal of unhappiness. Care is a very uneasy pillow on which to rest the head. We need only look into men's eyes and read the open book of their brow to know how much need there is for our Lord's calm counsel, "Be not anxious for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The habit of nursing presentiments and harbouring apprehensions is for one thing most futile. Supposing the very worst happens, supposing the thing we most fear has to meet us in the face, the fact that we have feared it beforehand does not prevent its coming; it will only sap from us our strength and prevent us from meeting it with courage. We discover also from our experience of life that in most cases the features of the thing dreaded are grossly exaggerated, when we view it in anticipation. Many of the things we fear are imaginary, or at least the imagination has distorted them out of all proportion.



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We spend in nervous anxiety the strength which would be sufficient to meet the dreaded reality confidently. The man of oversanguine temperament may sometimes be disappointed and it may be a great blow to lose what was hoped for, but he has at least had some of the pleasure of anticipation. The man of nervous overanxious temperament is also sometimes disappointed of his fear, and even if there be some joy in the relief, he has already suffered all the agony of the dread, and his new joy is soon lost as he conjures up new spectres. "If hopes are dupes, fears may be liars." In any case hope is a better companion than fear. By living ahead we are afflicting ourselves needlessly. The old proverb tells us not to cross our bridges till we get to them, and it is wise; for we may not have to cross the bridge at all. We only multiply evil by living in constant anxiety and seeing something ominous in every event and



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forecasting trouble for every to-morrow. The day is not due, and the evil thereof is not due until the day.

There is a sin of fear. It would only be a folly if life could be viewed without religion, but in that light it is more than folly—it is sin. Our Lord condemns this fearful state of mind not as foolishness merely, but as want of faith. His whole argument is based on the fact that God exercises a wise and loving providence. It is because God cares for us that we can cast off our cares. The only cure for care is faith. The only true defense against fear is the knowledge of a loving heavenly Father. To fear God truly is to lose all other fear. Tacitus passes his judgment on a man that he feared everything except God—and we feel this to be a natural conclusion. It is true that there seem to be men, who live their life without fear and yet without God. In *Old Mortality* Sir



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Walter Scott describes the combat at Drumclog between Bothwell and Balfour of Burleigh. "Die, wretch, die," said Balfour setting his foot on Bothwell's body and transfixing him with his sword, "die, bloodthirsty dog, die as thou hast lived, die as the beasts that perish, hoping nothing, believing nothing," "And fearing nothing," said Bothwell, expiring as he spoke these desperate words. It is not quite consistent even with the picture of Bothwell which Scott gives, as he has his moments of remorse and regret, and there was some bravado in Bothwell's dying boast; but it is quite possible that a man of sufficiently coarse grain, who had killed all his highest instincts, might be described as without God and without fear in the world as he is without hope.

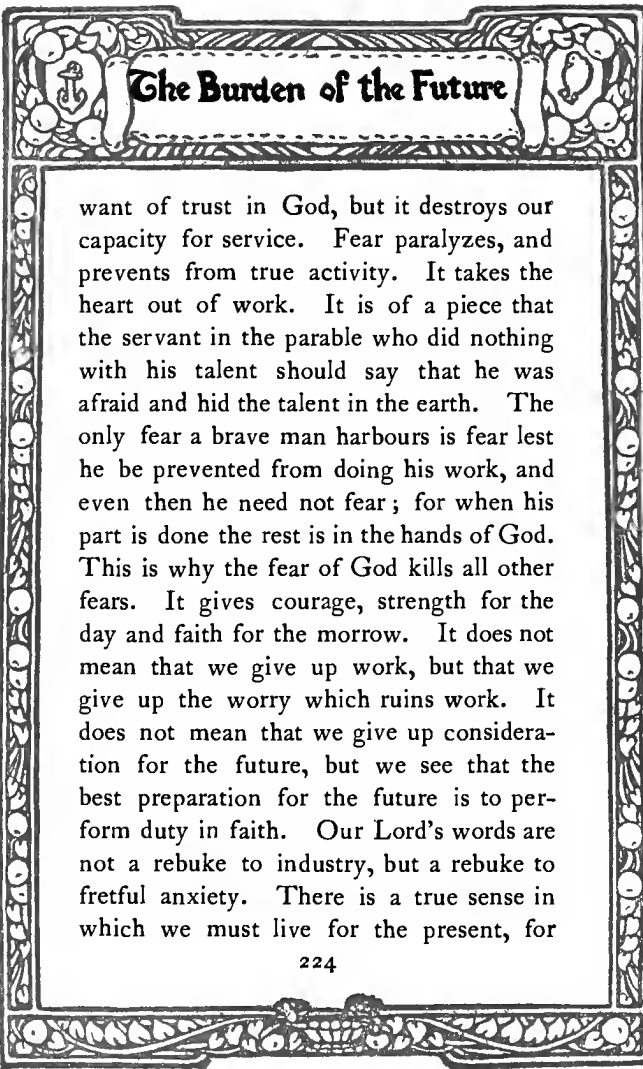
Thus, when we speak about the sin of fear, we do not forget that there may be a sin of fearlessness. It is possible to live with little care and few misgivings,



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thoughtless of the future, never anxious for the morrow, and yet to be living a godless life. There is a self-confidence, which has plenty of courage and no morbidness, but which has no kinship with this spirit of faith inculcated by Jesus. That is not the calm serenity and peaceful grace to which He points as the typical tone of the Christian life. The only adequate and permanent cure for care is faith, the faith which knows oneself in the hands of love. Wherefore should we fear in the day of evil, if we are led through by the Good Shepherd? Even in the dark valley of the shadow we need fear no evil. Wherefore fear for the future and be over-anxious for the morrow? "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The next day like this day is with Him who can make it true of us, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Another reason why this habit of fearfulness is evil is not only that it displays



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want of trust in God, but it destroys our capacity for service. Fear paralyzes, and prevents from true activity. It takes the heart out of work. It is of a piece that the servant in the parable who did nothing with his talent should say that he was afraid and hid the talent in the earth. The only fear a brave man harbours is fear lest he be prevented from doing his work, and even then he need not fear; for when his part is done the rest is in the hands of God. This is why the fear of God kills all other fears. It gives courage, strength for the day and faith for the morrow. It does not mean that we give up work, but that we give up the worry which ruins work. It does not mean that we give up consideration for the future, but we see that the best preparation for the future is to perform duty in faith. Our Lord's words are not a rebuke to industry, but a rebuke to fretful anxiety. There is a true sense in which we must live for the present, for



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present duty and the tasks that lie to our hand, not anxious about the morrow. It is the spirit of the apostle's injunction, "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." When we have given heart and soul and life to God, we need not worry about all the possible evil things that may happen to-morrow. We can throw ourselves with energy and power into the life of to-day. The man of faith, just because in the larger sense he lives for the future and because he has not given his heart to the present, can make the most of the present, content now and ever that his times are in God's hand.

Not love thy life nor hate; but what thou liv'st
Live well, how long or short permit to heaven.

This true courage of faith is the attitude of mind which brings peace; for it means a heart at leisure from itself. It takes the sting out of trouble. No turn of affairs



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can come amiss to him, who fears nothing that the future can bring because he tastes the sweetness of the Father's love.

Herein is the secret, the true alleviation of the burden of to-morrow ; not the false and feeble attempt to oppose care by carelessness, to turn from the anxieties and troubles of life to a wild recklessness, assuming only a painful jauntiness which conceals the pain. The true remedy is not forgetfulness, but faith. This is the peace of God which passeth all understanding, which guards the heart and calms the fevered life. To the soul, which has this noble courage born of faith, no turn of affairs can come amiss. He is not open to the blows of chance. It is not mere resignation : it is glad confidence that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. " If I should intend Liverpool and land in heaven," said John Howe about a passage from Ireland. If,



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what then? To John Howe, who knew that the eternal God was his refuge, and underneath were the everlasting arms, what shadow could the future have? Why should he be bowed down by the burden of to-morrow? As his days, right on till the last sand had run, right on till the last gasp of breath, so would be his strength.

It is at least a beautiful faith. Whether justified by the facts or not, it is a grand answer to the doubts and fears and questionings of the heart of flesh. Well, it is the faith of the Bible, the inspiring confidence of every godly man who overcame the world. It is also the distinct teaching of Jesus, comforting us by the strength and assurance of His words: "Be not anxious for the morrow." He speaks of the life of fretful anxiety, the cares which fetter the soul to earth. It is also His marvellous example to us, as calmly He filled His hours with doing the Father's will, and with secure tread walked in the



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light of day. Part of the way for Him was the *via dolorosa*. The future, which He took so graciously, had in it the cross and the passion.

We are not promised days of perpetual prosperity, and a path smooth to the feet, fringed with flowers, and stretching out in changeless sunshine. But we are promised to be kept in perfect peace, if our hearts are fixed on God. It is not likely that the future will be what we expect; it is not likely that the way we shall traverse will be all our fancy paints, but if it is His way for us it is well. This is not the preaching of fatalism, ending in mere passive endurance and sluggish inaction, but faith, bringing an inspiring motive to life, clearing the feet from entanglements, and setting all powers free to perform the duty of the day. "Why wilt thou be concerned beyond to-day," asks Luther, "and take upon thyself the misfortunes of two days?" Put thus, with Luther's sancti-



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fied common sense, it is foolish from any point of view, but it is more than foolish from the point of view of faith.

The whole argument is really an appeal to accept the consequences of our faith. Faith in God being what it is through Christ, it should follow as an inevitable conclusion that we must not take upon our weak shoulders the burden of to-morrow and weaken our lives with faithless fears. Christ transmutes fear into faith. In Him we see that the Father's love is the very heart of the universe and the centre of life. Why then should we fear? To be brought into the filial relationship with God in which Jesus lived is to be emancipated from the bondage of fear. If we are living ahead in fretful anxiety, supping sorrow with a long spoon, in fear about what to-morrow may bring, calculating all the chances and the mischances, is it not because we are weak in



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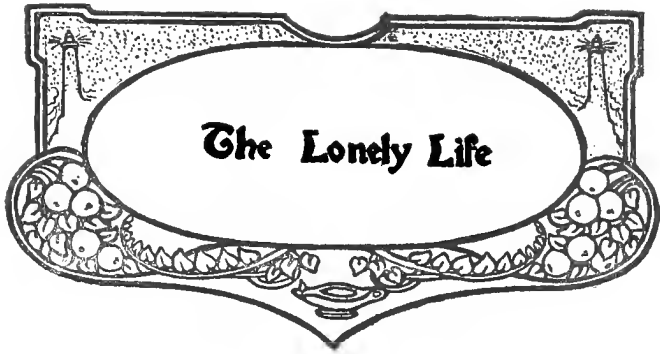
faith somewhere? When despondency comes and doubt and darkness hover round, when heart and flesh begin to faint and fail, there is ever the same refuge in God. When the evils of the day arise, there is ever the same resource. "I even I am He that comforteth you. Who art thou who art afraid of man that shall die and of the son of man which shall be made as grass, and hast forgotten the Lord thy maker?"

Further, we can afford to take short views of the present because we take a long view of the future. The belief in immortality is part of the belief in God. There is no line of proof which can demonstrate it by syllogisms. It must be part of our faith in the nature and purpose of God. We reach this ultimate peace of faith in a future life not by a process of reasoning but by accepting the Christian teaching of the relation in which man stands to God. Without this larger faith

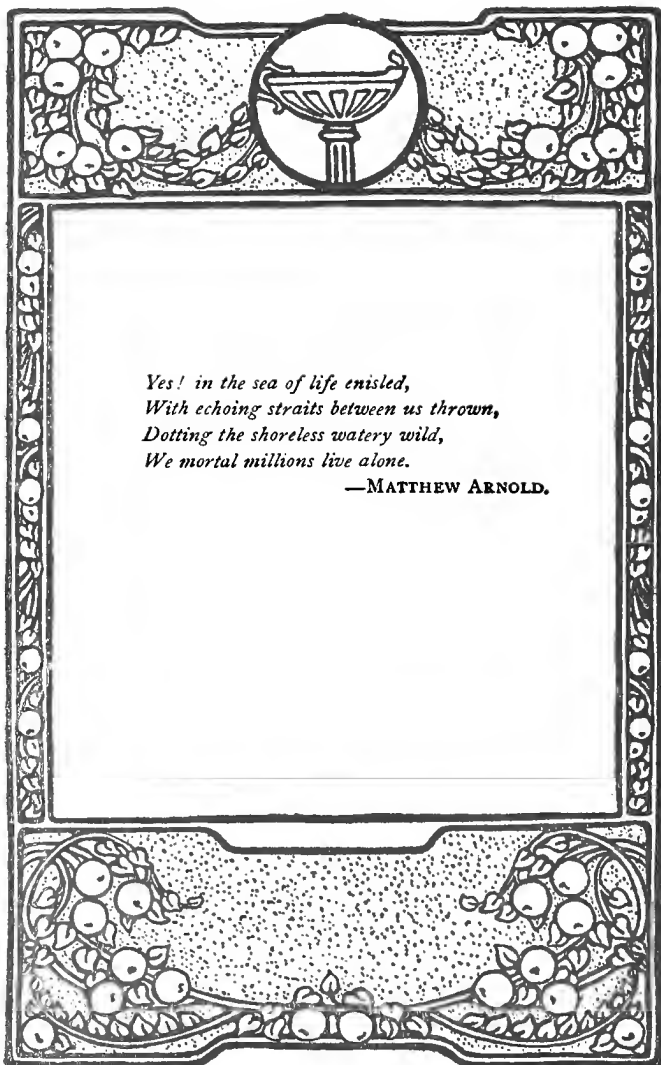


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in the future we would be without defense and without comfort in the face of the worst desolations of the heart. No earthly consolation can reach the root of the deepest sorrows of life. Without eternity there would be some wounds that could never be staunched, and some griefs that must be incurable. There can be no healing of the grave's most poignant sting without immortal faith. Our heart need not be troubled or afraid if we believe in the God whom Jesus revealed. We can leave ourselves and all our future and all our love to Him. In the power of endless life, all burdens are lightened. The sunshine of eternity illumines the mansions of time.



The Lonely Life



*Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.*

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.



The Lonely Life

THE ultimate meaning to us of the whole problem of pain lies in the region of the moral life. That is why there is no single solution to explain all the mystery, and why each separate soul has to face the problem anew. There is a Scottish proverb which says that the king sighs as often as the peasant, which is not merely a truth of popular observation, but is also the recognition that the problem of life is more than one of outward adjustment and is rather one of inward relations. However fortunate the environment and whatever be the satisfaction the heart receives for all its human cravings, there is a region apart, untrod by other feet. There is a fundamental isolation of life, in which the individual stands alone, with a life below every form



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of the social life, the depths of which cannot be reached by mortal man. Indeed the keenest pain is often created by a sense of loneliness, by the experience that no human fellowship can dissolve the solitude in which each soul lives.

At first this seems contrary to facts ; for the thought of our age all runs in the direction of establishing the lines of connection between men, stating the points of contact, declaring our common humanity. Social science is laying hold of the oneness of the race, and sets forth the mutual relationships which exist between men. Human life, we are ever reminded, is not isolated. We are joined together with the subtlest and with the strongest bonds. There is no getting away from the situation, no cutting of the tie which connects us. The Christian truth, that we are members one of another, finds many illustrations in other levels of life. The well-being of one is a matter of congratulation



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for the whole ; the ill-doing of one does damage to the condition of all. The truth of the apostle's words is being brought home to us, "No man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself."

In our ordinary every-day relations with our fellows we soon learn that we must consider others whether we will or no. We live in families, in townships, in nations. There is always a larger life of which we are a part. We have little patience with hermits, and no room for them. As a result, possibly, of the ever-increasing complexity of society, in our thinking to-day we do not consider men merely as individuals. Political economy views men's relationships and not men themselves. Politicians speak of classes and masses, and no longer of individuals. Even industry is organized into companies and combinations and trusts, with limited liability. This sinking of the single member in the society is undoubtedly the tendency of our



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day, and in some respects is a tendency which carries much hope of better things for the whole social condition.

Every such tendency, however, has its corresponding danger, and here the danger is that we are inclined to forget that the society, however complex, is composed of individuals. In our glowing hopes of what may be done by social rules and laws affecting environment, we may forget that we are all moral beings, with heart and conscience and life of our own. We speak of the masses in a dim sort of way as a unity, but if we investigate their lives, if we follow them into their homes, we find that the masses consist of units, each, it may be, with his own heart's bitterness, and perchance sometimes with his own joys. The community of human life, which is being emphasized so much, is a lesson which bears repetition—our common ties and common duties and common responsibilities—but at the same time we dare not



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lose sight of the essential singleness of human life. Otherwise we have no moral appeal to make, and if men are not viewed as single individuals, with personal powers of intellect and heart, with a moral life and conscience, how can you even speak to them of ties and duties and responsibilities at all ?

The solitude of human life remains a solemn fact. Every man has a hermit life. There are crannies of his being into which no spying eye can peer, corners of his heart where the dust can gather undisturbed by stranger hands, passages of his soul sacred to his own memories of the past and his own experiences of the present, a holy of holies within, guarded from trespass. We are more than we ever express. We never fully explain ourselves. Even when we think we are opening up our nature to our fellows, in spite of ourselves something is kept back. We cannot express com-



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pletely even a single phase of our nature or a single stage of our life. The words which we use to reveal ourselves tend, in a large degree, to conceal ourselves also. The complete reason for every smile or sigh is never stated by one of us.

This fact then remains, whether we are conscious of it or not, of the solitude of human life, for weal or woe. We each have this life, we and none other. We can do much for each other; there are burdens we can share; we have powers of sympathy and love, which enable us to get out of self; we can rejoice with those who do rejoice and weep with those who weep; we can even love our neighbour as ourself—and yet there is a region in the depth of our nature shut to intruders, a limit at which we stop and say, “Thus far and no farther”; nay, there is a personality which, with the best will in the world, we cannot unveil to human eyes; there is a burden which every man must bear and only can



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bear; there is a heart's bitterness which the heart alone can fully know, and a joy with which a stranger may not intermeddle.

This is a simple statement of a very familiar fact in every-day experience. We can see it, for example, in our helplessness in the presence of grief. There is no place where we feel our own littleness and realize how empty words are, as in the presence of a great sorrow. We can only stand with bowed head silent, and not attempt to utter our usual proverbs. However blessed sympathy is, we sometimes learn that there are wounds that go too deep for human help. Perhaps this inherent solitude of human life is seen more in sorrow than in joy. Joy tends to bring out our oneness in many respects. In joy we are in sympathy with all the bright side of nature, the birds, and the flowers, and the little children. We are in harmony with the pleasant ripple of the murmuring



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brook and the joyous rustle of the trees clapping their hands. Even a simple jest may be like the touch of nature, which makes the whole world kin. But sorrow makes the sorrowing quiver at the sound of outside rejoicings as at the lash of a whip. The contrast seems too painful. Why should the sun shine so blithely when all is dark within? "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

Perhaps this is the reason why sorrow will bring many a man to God whom joy would never bring. Pleasure while it lasts tends to breed self-sufficiency, but bitterness is a great destroyer of conceit.

Eyes which the preacher could not school
By wayside graves are raised,
And lips say, "God be pitiful,"
Who ne'er said, "God be praised."

Dumas, in his Memoirs, gives a pathetic instance of the contrast there may be be-



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tween a man's outer and inner life. His first great triumph happened when his play, *Henry III*, was received in Paris with a sensational ovation. His mother was dangerously ill, and at the end of each act he rushed home to see how she was. The night before he was obscure; the next morning he was the talk of all Paris. "How many people envied me my triumph that evening, who little knew that I passed the night on a mattress on the ground at the bedside of a dying mother."

It usually takes some severe experience to convince us of this isolation of life; for at first there seems no limit to what man can do for man. It might seem even that if our different social organizations were only more perfect there would be no troubles which go too deep for human aid, no trials, sorrows, or griefs which are altogether beyond the help of man. In pain of body we turn to the skill and knowl-



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edge and loving care of our fellows. We find at least some help of a real and definite kind from physician and nurse and friends. If the disease cannot be cured, it can be alleviated. In troubles of the mind we turn, and not in vain, to those we trust. There is no mental anguish, which cannot be shared and thus eased by being shared. Men have been enabled to smile at misfortune, and through the sweet help of human kind, adversity has been turned into joy. In cases of bereavement when the heart is dulled by its fierce shock we might think that we had at last reached the point where vain is the help of man, yet many a mourner has been soothed by a touch, a look, a word, a prayer, which have had their source in a pitiful human heart.

It is true that perfect and complete help is not to be had from man for any of these troubles, physical or mental, and the vanity of it is felt when the iron enters the soul. Yet God has made it possible for



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us to find and to give comfort and help. It is part of the training of life and the blessing of life. Indeed it is part, and a great part, of the purpose of trouble itself. Even when we speak of time as a healer of sorrow, we only illustrate the truth of this statement. Time in itself is no healer of sorrow, nay rather the longer a grief is brooded over and the deeper in the soul it is buried, the more hopeless it becomes, but healing and comfort and strength are obtained in time by getting out from the region of the sorrow into healthful touch with our fellows. Few men are without some stock in the great possessions of human society—the love of friends, the sympathy of well-wishers, the benevolence of the good, more or less reliable in times of need.

Still, with all this we feel that in the final issues of life we are alone, even beyond the aid of man. It is part of the price we pay for moral life, and part of



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the burden we are to carry. We can see this even in many of these common troubles to which we have referred, when the trouble has patently a moral root, when for instance the bereavement is touched by remorse or haunted by fear. If there were nothing in the world that we can call sin, and nothing that makes us feel our isolation as separate entities, or if help were completely defined as physical comfort, we might never feel this sense of utter helplessness either to give or to get. When, however, we are face to face with the moral problems of life, we feel instinctively that we must look above man. The other troubles were not like this. There is a frost in winter, which lives in sunshine and which though cold is bracing; and there is a frost with which even a gleam of sunshine is impossible, which strikes to the bones and the heart. In man some consolation and external help are to be found, but not in man nor in the

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son of man is there a principle of life for moral death. Sin isolates, and only as a surface fact is there comradeship in evil. Men can bear other burdens for us and help to carry other loads, but in this we are awfully alone. It is solemnly true that no man can bear his brother's sin nor save his brother's soul. We live each in a world of our own, a world of desperate desolation, and vain is the help of man. It is the poisoned barb of the shaft which makes the arrow deadly. It is the moral sting which is somewhere in our troubles that makes man's help vain. Others as well as Macbeth have gone to man to find a physician for a sin-sick soul, and have asked despairingly and mockingly for some one to minister to a mind diseased, and to "cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart."

This fact of the solitude of life which



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we have been emphasizing and illustrating, carries with it some temptations and dangers. One is the mistake of supposing that we should cultivate universal distrust of man. To doubt human nature is to doubt goodness, and that ultimately is to doubt God. Perhaps the most dangerous type of man is the cynic, who denies the existence of honour and unselfishness and purity and truth. It is the falsest of creeds, and he is false that holds it. "Cynicism," says Meredith in *The Egoist*, is "intellectual dandyism without the coxcomb's feathers, and cynics are only happy in making the world as barren to others as they have made it for themselves." When we trust our own instincts and experience, we know that goodness and integrity exist. Unselfishness is no unknown virtue, nor is truth a stranger in our midst.

When we speak of the vanity of human help we are merely stating the fact that we cannot count invariably on men.



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It is not the depravity of human nature we have to fear, but its frailty. We dare not risk all upon it. It is good to remember this; for it may keep sour cynicism from the heart when the day of trial comes. The closest friend may fail and give way at the pinch. The bruised reed we lean on may break and pierce the all too trustful hand. It is not the wickedness of men which makes them unreliable; it is their weakness. "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils." He is such another as thyself. He too is borne down by the same weight. We know his frame; we remember that he is dust. It was Christ's experience, and part of the cross He had to bear. "Can ye not watch with me one hour?" He said in His hour of agony to the three He trusted most of all humankind. His earthly ministry was mostly taken up with the training of twelve men to be faithful and true; and at the crucial moment



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one betrayed Him, another denied Him, and all forsook Him and fled. It was not depravity of heart in these men—in some the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. It is the lesson of life that there is no stay, no safety in the arm of flesh, that human love may fail, and human strength may break.

Another temptation, which springs from the facts of the solitary life, is the temptation to become self-centred, to brood over our own bitterness and exult in our own joy. The horizon of our emotions is limited at the best, and we are sometimes shocked at our own callousness. As a rule, we are interested in other people, only in so far as they touch our lives. Selfishness is the sin of sins, and is possible because of the very dignity and power of concentration which gives us a separate existence. Yet we feel that, before the highest qualities of human nature are possible to us, that foe must be slain. We must get out of our-



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selves somehow, and must get into touch with other life. We must be drawn from our greatest sorrow, and be led to share our highest joy. The lonely life must be broken into somehow. In the face of all the dangers and sorrows and fears that menace life, we need some source of comfort for ourselves and some source of strength for the service of others.

For a moment a man may be consoled by nature with Byron—

There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar.

Not for long is comfort found there. The poet who raved so much in his own great way about the sea and the mountains, who spoke of mingling with the universe and trusting the billows, who called the mountains friends and the ocean a home, and found companionship in the



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desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam—he came back from nature with ever the same sense of insufficiency gnawing at his heart. He came back to his fellow men, with his poor weak fretting unrelieved and his passion unstilled. To the end a bitterness, unsoftened by his wild proud life, clung round his heart. In no mere nature worship, poetic reverie or artistic ecstasy, is there to be found heart's ease and the filling up of the aching void. Nature will only deepen the desolation, unless we can get beyond it to the Presence which fills it, beyond nature to nature's God.

The same ultimate failure waits all who substitute humanity for nature, who even throw themselves practically into all sorts of social service, who seek to deny the lonely life by cultivating many external relationships. It is the same sort of need which drives the lighter kind into endless social gaieties and frivolous dissipations. There is no real and lasting escape



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from the lonely life by any such external means. If they achieved all they promised, there would still remain that region in the depth of our nature, of which we have spoken, which is shut to all intruders. Human feet cannot stand there on the very threshold of the soul's abode. Into that holy of holies none can enter, even if he would. Flesh would perish there before that dread apocalypse of soul.

This continual craving of man for companionship in the lonely life, even in the valley of the shadow, is surely not disregarded. It is there that God meets him, there in that holy of holies of the heart, shut to every other visitant. Life in its ultimate issue is lonely, because we were made for a higher companionship. Our Lord felt this solitude of human life, and looked forward at the last calmly to the time when He should be left alone, and could add, "And yet I am not alone, be-



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cause the Father is with me." This, too, is the solution for us, and in the loneliest places of life we may find the heart's bitterness and joy, which brought the pain of solitude, turned into holy and blessed sacraments. There is divine comfort for human sorrow, divine healing for human wounds, divine forgiveness for human sin, divine help for human loneliness.

This is the message of religion. This is Christ's offer, to satisfy the ultimate needs of our nature. In His love, bitterness is lost and joy is shared. In His service the life is stripped of its selfishness. He may have to lead us out of ourselves through sorrow, and if we follow He will lead us out of our sorrow through sympathy. In Him we reach out into a truer and fuller life. Through Christ we reach Christ's brethren. He Himself graduated in the school of pain, and trained Himself for His office, and can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Com-



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munion with Him satisfies our deepest needs and prepares us for the highest service. The lonely life is lost in the Christ life. The hour comes to all when we must know that vain is the help of man, when we shall be scattered every man to his own, when we too must be solitary in the lonely life. Surely our house is left to us desolate, if we have no knowledge of a gracious Companion—if we cannot say, “Not alone, for the Father is with me.”

One conclusion we have reached is that it is not a speculative solution of this whole problem which we need most. No formula will gather up all the mystery, and make plain to the mind the difficulties and torturing doubts of which this subject is full. What we need most is certainty of God, that we might hold fast our faith in Him. We will still be beset by mystery, and the world's sorrows and our own pain will still remain a terrible problem,



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but we will see enough to make us willing to believe and wait. We will let every experience of trial and sorrow bring some lessons to withdraw our hearts from the love of the material. We will learn to look upon the whole discipline of life as a means of sanctification, and in our highest moments we will see it to be a terror to be left of God, and will pray that the beautiful promise may be true for us, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." When we do, the last word to us is not tribulation, but joy. Even suffering only sets a seal on faith, like the kiss of God upon the brow. Faith sees far enough into the meaning of tribulation to see in it the sign of love; for it sees in it the Father's hand.

I know Thee who hast kept my path, and
made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering
sorrow,
So that it reached me like a solemn joy.

