

COMFORT FOR THE DESPONDING

by Various

A collection of devotional readings offering encouragement to those experiencing discouragement and despair. Grounded in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, the work reminds believers that present troubles are achieving an eternal weight of glory.

16 Chapters

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01 Help in Trouble!

Help in Trouble!

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal!" 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

"Though the mountains are shaken and the hills are removed — yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed — says the LORD, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me!" Psalms 138:7

"For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his pavilion; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock!" Psalms 27:5

"God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" Hebrews 13:5-6 "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you!" Isaiah 66:13

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!" Psalms 23:1-6 "God is our refuge and strength — a very present help in times of trouble!" Psalms 46:1 To attempt to prove that man is exposed to trouble, and that man when in trouble needs help, would be a sort of mockery. Eliphaz, the Temanite, one of Job's friends, was wrong in applying his argument to Job; but he did not at all misrepresent man's condition, when he said, "For affliction does not come from the dust — nor does trouble spring from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward!" Job 5:6-7

How uncommon to find any who say, "We have never known trouble!" Sometimes someone begins a sentence, "I may say, I scarcely knew trouble until" — then comes the mention of some trouble indeed . . .

that first bereavement,

that crushing calamity,

that serious illness, or

that deep, sharp, first conviction of sin and sense of danger for the soul. With others life has been, throughout a series of years, a succession of heavy troubles — wave rolling after wave, storm following storm — each trouble in some sense heavier than the preceding, because of the increased accumulation. And hence some err in judgment, like Job's friends, and imagine that where there are the heaviest troubles — there must have been the greatest sins. "I know not what I have done," said a young man leaning on crutches, with his health gone, and his power of supporting himself gone with it. "I know not what I have done," he said to me, with a countenance showing an embittered spirit — "why God should send me such heavy troubles." I tried to teach him what may be the wise and loving purpose of God, afflicting in order to profit us, by drawing us to Himself through Christ our Savior.

But, I said, it is needless, it is also superfluous, to prove that we are exposed to trouble.

We need help. Is it enough to have human help in trouble? Man can but minister help, as God permits. Man's help is very limited indeed — many troubles are far beyond his effectual help. How little he can do in mental and emotional troubles! Outward troubles are chiefly troubles — as they press upon the mind. What miserable comforters are worldly friends to one whose mind is pierced with anxiety! How poor are their topics of comfort! How chilling is their anemic philosophy! It is often little better than stoic apathy, or brutish insensibility. For the whole class of spiritual troubles, from the first conviction of sin, to the last conflict between the flesh and the spirit — the worldly can give no help. That conviction, they would bid you drown in dissipation; that conflict, they would stupefy with narcotics. And then spiritually-minded men will all testify they can help only as instruments for God. They disclaim all idea of helping in any other way. "Being helped — we help. Being comforted — we comfort." Looking, with John the Baptist, to Jesus for help, we say, with him, to you, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 But God is our "help in trouble." Why look for help hither and thither, where it cannot be found — to the neglect of Him who alone can help effectually? Only think, if in your trouble you could have . . .

the richest of men to come and help to relieve your poverty,

the strongest of men to minister to your bodily weakness, and the wisest of men to counsel you in perplexity

— you would deem it a privilege and a favor. That you cannot have. But even that, if you could have it, might prove very insufficient help. But here you may have . . .

God in all the riches of His grace;

God in all the energy of His almighty power;

God in all the wisdom of His omniscience

— to be your "very present help in times of trouble!"

He is not a God afar off — but "very present" — close at hand, ready to work in you, speaking to your heart, applying to your soul His divine consolations and support. "Under me are the

everlasting arms!" Yes, you may find "God a very present help in times of trouble."

You observe the climax of goodness;

God is "a help."

God is "a present help."

God is "a very present help in times of trouble." Can language be more expressive? Can heart desire more?

It would be easy to illustrate this from the dealings of God with His people as recorded in Scripture. To show how Abraham, so tried and troubled, was yet so comforted by God. How Jacob, who at one time exclaimed, "All these things are against me," would now testify, "All these things have worked together for my good!" How David, so persecuted by Saul, was so preserved by the providence and comforted by the grace of God. How New Testament saints join in with more ancient believers, to swell the concert of praise to a faithful, covenant-keeping God, as their "refuge and strength — a very present help in trouble."

Reader, I rather want your testimony. I long for you also to know God in your present and future troubles. You are in trouble now. It is quite enough to tell you so; there is no need of describing the trouble which oppresses so heavily. And now, I ask you, Do you truly know God? You have heard of Him I know, "by the hearing of the ear." But do you know Him by your own faith and experience, as "our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble?"

Remember, your experience is not only for your own life and comfort, but also for the attraction of strangers to Christ — for the encouragement of weaker brethren — for the edification of the whole Church of the faithful, and to glorify the all-sufficient grace of God. Abide, then, in Christ, your safe refuge. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might!" Glorify God in the fires of tribulation. Treasure up past and present experience for future encouragement. Trust God also for others — for all your fellow-believers. Encourage all the faithful to join their testimony with yours, "God is our strength."

Remember Martin Luther, who, when he and his brother-Reformers were in some new trouble, things seeming to go against them, used to exhort them, "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm!" And he made a note, I have been told, by this Psalm, in the margin of his Psalter, "This is my comforting Psalm!"

So, in our day, in the progress of our revived reformation, when the clouds sometimes look dark, and some friends prove faithless, and others faint, let us refer to this comforting Psalm: "We will not fear." We will "be still and know that he is God;" and more, we will sing in the fiercest tumult, "The Lord Almighty is with us — the God of Jacob is our refuge!"

"Gracious and Almighty Redeemer, Your love surpasses knowledge. Oh, keep me near Your heart now, henceforth, and forever! Amen and amen."

02 The Barked Fig Tree!

The Barked Fig Tree!

"He has laid waste my vine, and barked my fig tree; He has stripped it bare and thrown it away!"
Joel 1:7

There will be memory in Heaven. Will Noah ever forget the Ark, or Abraham Mount Moriah, or Jacob his wrestling with the angel? No — never! Will Joseph ever forget the pit and the prison, or Moses the passage of the Red Sea, or the woman of Samaria the conversation at Jacob's well? No — never! Will Mary and Martha ever forget the village of Bethany, or Peter Christ's look in Pilate's Hall, or Paul the road to Damascus, or John the Isle of Patmos? No — never!

Now, one of the uses to which memory will be applied in the heavenly state, will be to review the wisdom and goodness, condescension and truth — which have guided our life in the present world. Let us, then, for a few moments, take something like a review of the discipline of life with which we are familiar in a greater or less degree.

EVERY MAN HAS A FIG-TREE. We very early become proprietors. We all have our fig-trees — all — whether born in a workhouse, or begotten in a palace.

What is a fig-tree? Something that we love; something that we are fond of; something that sends a living joy through the warm heart whenever we think of it. The fig-tree of one man is an ample fortune; of another, buoyant health; of another, success in business; of another, a beloved relative; of another, a lovely child; of another, a happy home. The fig-tree of the infant is a choice toy. The fig-tree of the child is a favorite companion. The fig-tree of the studious youth is a school prize and college honors. The fig-tree of the young man is a beautiful day-dream of future years. The fig-tree of the groom is his bride. The fig-tree of the bride is her husband. The fig-tree of the mother is her first-born. The fig-tree of the father is an only daughter. The fig-trees under which we each sit are different in size, in foliage, and in fruit — but every man has a fig-tree! Some of our fellow-creatures are so poor, and their life from the cradle to the grave such a struggle with misery — that we would hardly have thought that they could have had a fig-tree. But they have. The human heart was made to love, and love it will, in spite of poverty, humiliation, and sorrow.

What is meant by barking of the fig-tree? Stripping it, peeling it, laying it bare and bleeding — and then the glorious fig-tree withers and dies. And so when . . .

this ample fortune is reduced, or

this buoyant health is shattered, or

this surprising success is reversed, or

these brilliant prospects are clouded, or

that beloved relative droops and dies, or

that darling child is snatched from our embrace, or

that happy home is turned into a house of mourning

— then have we the reality of which the saying is the picture — the barking of the fig-tree! Have you not seen . . .

the infant's toy broken, and

the child's companion die, and

the betrothed married to another, and

the bride carried to her tomb, and

the husband left a widower, and

the wife become a widow, and

the first-born carried away by death, and

the only son become a miserable prodigal?

You have seen all this, and you have heard the voice of an infant, and of a child, and of a youth, and of an adult, say, "He has barked my fig-tree!"

Every man is liable to have his fig-tree barked. Are there no exceptions here? None!

If special friendship with God could have spared his fig-tree — then Abraham would not have heard the command to offer his son.

If distinguished honor could have spared his fig-tree — then David would not have entered his palace, saying, "O Absalom, my son Absalom, would to God that I had died instead of you!" Or if pre-eminent usefulness could have spared his fig-tree — then Paul would not have felt his keen thorn in the flesh.

"There is no discharge in this war!" "Every heart knows its own bitterness!" There is not one, the fairest, and youngest, richest, and healthiest — whose feet, sooner or later, will not have to pass through the deep waters of the Divine chastisement.

Pain and sorrow;

disappointment and temptation;

death and judgment

— await us all. But how are we prepared to meet them? Is it in reliance upon our own strength of will, or our own righteousness of life? If so, then, alas, for our souls! The feeble reed will snap beneath the hand that leans upon it! The foundation of sand will sink beneath the storm! The frail anchor will give way when the tempest of judgment comes, and leave us amid the swelling floods of the great day, like a vessel that has drifted from its anchorage — the helpless prey of every wave.

WHY does God bark our fig-tree? There are many wise and gracious purposes.

One purpose is to promote consideration. "When times are bad — CONSIDER!" Ecclesiastes 7:14 The great sin, danger, folly, and ruin of men is, that they will not think. They will hear, read, admire, applaud — but they will not think. Now, when God has a purpose of mercy towards any, He seems to say, "I am resolved that he shall think, and I will send him that which will make him think!" Then comes the barking of the fig-tree. Then follows, thinking upon hitherto forgotten subjects — the divine, the spiritual, the eternal. "Now, I see!" says the stricken one, "that there is no friend, like the friend that sticks closer than a brother. There is no refuge of my soul, like Jesus! There is no rock, like the rock of ages! There is no treasure like heavenly treasure! Fig-trees, farewell! I will flee away from you to God my Savior, my everlasting home." For the most part, we refuse to listen to God in the time of health and prosperity. In the garden where flowers are blooming beautifully, and trees are waving freshly — we have seldom an ear for the voice of Him who penciled every leaf and feathered every bough. But when the flowers are all withered, the trees are stripped, and the garden is but a grave of what once it held — the most worldly mind is for a time subdued into listening to God. It is as though God had been hidden by the deep rich foliage — but he could now be seen, when the blight and the storm have done their stern office. And is it so that the beloved of our hearts must die, before we can live. Must bough after bough of fragrant blossom and pleasant fruit be severed; must the fig-tree be barked before we are led to give to God our hearts, and to Christ our service. Yes, it is even so. The loss of wife, or children, or property, or health — has often resulted in untold blessings to the loser. It has produced in him pious thoughtfulness, and the eternal Spirit has made it the means and occasion of his conversion to God. When God barks our fig-tree — it is to open the Scriptures to our hearts. But are not preachers and commentators, the best interpreters of Scripture? Nay, heart-break is the deepest teacher. What a different book is the Bible when the fig-tree is in its prime — from what it is when barked and withered! How different when the mind is at ease is that passage, "Cast your burden on the Lord" — from what it is when crushed with a load of care! And when surrounded by friends and helpers, how different is that passage, "I will never leave you nor forsake you!" — from what it is when deserted of all and left alone. How different when the family circle is unbroken is the voice from Heaven, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!" — from what it is when death has made a gap in it. How much more power and life and peace in one case, than in the other. Who does not know how the Bible appears to open itself in the season of trouble. Its pages seem a hundredfold more irradiated, when we have to darken our windows because death has crossed our doors — than when the full unclouded sun has poured upon us all its light. The Bible may be called a handbook for the afflicted. Nothing is better calculated to soothe sorrow and alleviate distress, than its devout perusal. The greater part of it would be insipid to a man who never passed through trouble of any kind, for there would be in it comparatively little personally interesting to him.

Set a man who knows nothing of trouble to preach a sermon on the words, "Deep calls unto deep; at the noise of your waterfalls all your waves and your billows are gone over me!" Set a man who never prayed in his life, who never lost a friend, who was never in any circumstances of deep sorrow and affliction, to give an exposition of the words, "You have covered your face with a cloud, so that my prayer should not pass through." But let God by some terrible providence "bark his fig-tree" — let a big cloud gather over his head — make him feel that he cannot bring his dead child back to life — that his wife will not hear him as she lies in her coffin — that he cannot build his house again that was burnt down last night — then he will understand the meaning of that lamentation, "You have covered your face with a cloud, that my prayer should not pass through,"

and its relation to his own state. This is a glorious result of affliction. The fig-tree is barked to teach heavenly mindedness. Fig trees drag down the heart to earth, and keep it there. I have heard, indeed, says the worldly mind, of a beautiful country where the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father, and I have listened to the pilgrims on the road to it singing —

"There is a land of pure delight,

Where saints immortal reign;

Infinite day excludes the night,

And pleasures banish pain!" But as long as I have my fig-tree, I am content with earth, and have no inclination to soar away to higher and purer regions. Then comes the barking of the fig-tree, and along with it a total change of sentiment, for then the confession is, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us!" This is the way in which God teaches heavenly-mindedness to His children. Who does not know how, in proportion, as tie after tie has been broken, as branch after branch has been cut off — the soul of the Christian will often soar heavenward as though on new wings — his worldly attachments proving themselves the only encumbrances, so that the place where he was stripped of them, becomes the place where he mounts nearest to the throne of the Eternal God! When God barks our fig-tree, it is to encourage sympathy. What a beautiful trait is compassion in the character of the Christian! How much of the loveliness of Jesus would disappear, were the tenderness to be withdrawn from it! How Jesus molds us into the pattern of His own tenderness by barking our fig-tree, for then we learn to "weep with those who weep," to be "a brother born for adversity," and delicately to handle the wounds of others, having felt the same ourselves. Who was the most tender-hearted member of the Christian Church? Was it not Paul? Where did he learn his sympathy? Was it not from his own sufferings?

Nay, where did Jesus learn to sympathize with His people? Was it in the heights of glory? Rather when He was led as a lamb to the slaughter — when in the darkness of the ninth hour He said, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me!" The barking of our fig-tree gives us a tender sympathy with fellow-sufferers, which mere knowledge can never give. And, oh, how differently sympathy is felt when it rises out of felt experience, from the mere sympathy of kind fellow-feeling.

Christian reader, the gospel affords the richest consolations when our fig-tree has been barked. It tells us that it is barked through the agency of Divine providence, "HE has barked my fig-tree!" Does God bark our fig-tree wantonly? The great are sometimes wanton; but wantonness can exist only where there is wickedness, and He who is said to bark the fig-tree is Holy, Holy, Holy! Carefulness in the treatment of all things, is one of the characteristics of the Divine conduct. Does God bark our fig-tree cruelly? Impossible, because God is Love. Can a mother find pleasure in the sufferings of her first-born? Will she break the toys of her babe, merely to see him weep? Will she put wormwood into the food of her child, merely to see him loathe it? Will she rob her boy of all his pleasures, merely to vex him? This is possible — but it is impossible that our God — for the mere sake of afflicting us, or for any pleasure which He could have in our pain — should bark our fig-tree. Can God bark our fig-tree ignorantly? He who formed the eye — shall He not see? He who teaches man knowledge — does He not know? He sees our fig-tree even when it is a sunny thought, and a pleasant imagination, and a golden hope. And if He strips it — it is not as when an

animal is slain by a random shot, or by a stray arrow; but as when a piece of intricate work is taken to pieces by a skillful workman. God's eye is fully upon the object, when He barks the fig-tree. Can God bark our fig-tree unwisely? Nay, He has an end — a right and a good end — and the very manner of his doing it is perfect. This barking of the fig-tree is part of His plan, and harmonizes with all His working from the beginning and forever. Sometimes we can see the end of the Lord — and sometimes we can see it within ourselves. The owner of the fig-tree has . . .

made too much of it,
esteemed it too highly,
felt too dependent upon it,
rejoiced in it too fully,
given his heart too much to it, and

has allowed it to screen God and Heaven from his view! He has looked too much at the traced shadow of the fig-tree upon the earth — and too little through the fig-tree to the blue heavens and to the sun beyond. He has sat under its shadow — when he should have been up and busy with work beyond it. He has confined himself to the fruit of this tree — when other provision has been made for his enjoyment and sustenance. He has felt this tree to be his all — and to correct this evil, God has barked his fig-tree.

If the end of the Lord is not CORRECTION, it may be PREVENTION. The tree may be barked . . .

lest it should screen God and Heaven from our sight,

lest we should try to rest under its shadow,

lest we should try to live by it alone,

or as preparation for some blessed estate — for the enjoyment of which this barking our fig-tree is the necessary training.

Reader, learn to see a Father's hand, yes, a Father's heart in every affliction! It is not a vindictive enemy who has chastened you — but a loving friend! It is not an unfeeling stranger — but a tender Father. He with a gentle, tender hand, has barked your fig-tree. No enemy has done it. It is no accident. God has done it. God has barked my fig-tree, and God is Love to His redeemed people.

Also, never forget that there is reserved for you a glorious tree that never fades — the tree of life! "And he showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Revelation 22:1-2

Therefore, account nothing safe until you reach that world in which no tree of pleasure dies, where every tree is a tree of rich and boundless LIFE.

While here on earth, learn to say, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my

portion forever!" Psalms 73:25-26 "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word."
Psalms 119:67

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.' Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Hebrews 12:5-7 "As a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you." Deuteronomy 8:5

"For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Job 5:6-7

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11

"Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal." Job 5:17-18

"It is Your hand, my God!

My sorrow comes from Thee,

I bow beneath Your chastening rod;

'Tis love that bruises me!

"I would not murmur, Lord,

Before You I am dumb!

Lest I should breathe one murmuring word,

To You for help I come.

"My God! Your name is love,

A Father's hand is Thine;

With tearful eye, I look above,

And cry, 'Your will be mine.'

"I know Your will is right,

Though it may seem severe;

Your path is still unsullied light,

Though dark it oft appear.

"Jesus for me has died;

Your Son You did not spare,

His pierced hands, His bleeding side,

Your love for me declare!

"Here my poor heart can rest,

My God! it cleaves to Thee;

Your will is love, Your end is blessed,

All work for good to me!"

03 Divine Care!

Divine Care!

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you!" 1 Peter 5:7 The Christian's life is very much made up of cares and comforts.

Cares spring from earth — comfort comes from Heaven.

Cares prove him a sinner — holy comforts prove him a saint.

Cares flow in from a variety of quarters — true comfort from only one quarter.

Cares come naturally — but comforts come supernaturally.

We shall be sure to have earthly cares — but shall we have divine comfort? This depends on God's grace, which gives it — and our faith, which receives it. Cares must be cast on our God — or they will prove a burden too heavy for us. They will depress us, bewilder us, and make us wretched. But here is our comfort — we have always ONE to care for us, and the very One which of all others we would wish to do so, "The Lord cares for you!"

God cares for whom? For you, who are born again by the Spirit. For you, who are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For you, who are placed in humble circumstances, being numbered with the poor of this world. For you, who are compassed about with so many cares, and who enjoy so few comforts. For you, who are surprised at your many fiery trials, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. For you, who are worried and harassed by Satan, who, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour. For you, who are persecuted by the world, and hated by men for your Savior's sake. For you, to whom Christ is precious — as He is to every one who truly believes in Him.

God's care extends to every Christian . . .

the young and the aged,

the weak and the strong,

the poor and the wealthy,

the doubting and the confident.

Believer, He cares for you! Who is it that cares for us?

It is the Lord, the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy;

who is so great — that we have no adequate conception of His greatness;

who is so good — that it is impossible fully to set forth His goodness;

who is so glorious — that no sinner can see His face and live.

It is He who created all things with His word, who governs all by His wisdom, and upholds all by His power. His resources are infinite,

His compassion is exquisite, and

His patience is surprisingly great.

He enters into all the circumstances of His redeemed people, is ever present with them, and rejoices over them to do them good. The angels obey Him, the seraphim adore Him, and all creation glorifies Him! But though He is so exalted, so holy, and so unspeakably great . . .

He cares for you — as base as you are.

He cares for you — as sinful as you are.

He cares for you — as depressed and discouraged as you are.

He cares for you. He cares for you individually, and according to the circumstances in which you are placed.

What does He do?

He cares for you!

He thinks of you!

He watches over you!

He sympathizes with you!

He feels the deepest interest in you!

He ever seeks your welfare!

He infallibly secures your good! Your misery touches His heart,

your needs lie open to His view,

and your cries enter into His ears!

He cares for you more than for the proudest monarch on his throne!

He cares for you — and His care is **CONSTANT**! It is not fitful or occasional — but ever the same.

He cares for you — and His care is **PATERNAL**! It is the care of a father for his child — the child whom he tenderly loves, and for whose welfare he feels the deepest concern.

He cares for you, and His care is **PERPETUAL**! He will never care for you less than He does at present. When old age weakens you,

when poverty pinches you,

when death appears just before you —

He will care for you as much as He does at this moment.

He cares for you — and His care is BENEFICIAL! It prevents innumerable evils — and secures the greatest possible amount of good. His care is more advantageous than the care of the kindest father, though that father were monarch of the mightiest empire, and possessed unbounded wealth. The care of God is of more value than the care of all His creatures combined.

He cares for you — but His care is MYSTERIOUSLY EXERCISED! It benefits us certainly — but secretly. It conceals itself behind the blessings it brings, and the evils it prevents.

He cares for you — and His care is SPECIAL! It is not the care which He has for the beasts which perish, or the unbelieving sinners who die under His frown.

He cares for you — and His care is PARTICULAR. It is care which extends to the very hairs of your heads, which, are all numbered — and to all the events and occurrences of your life, however minute or commonplace!

Beloved, here is our comfort. We may lose the care of an earthly relative or dear friend by death — but the Lord ever lives; and while He lives, He . . .

ever loves us,

thoroughly knows us, and

never ceases to care for us!

Here is the ground of our confidence for the future. We know not where we shall be, nor what we shall be — for we know not what a day may bring forth. But this we know, that God will care for us, and, caring for us — He will fulfill His precious promises to us.

If God cares for us, then . . .

let us cast all our cares upon Him;

let us live in daily fellowship with Him;

let us seek all our supplies from Him.

If God cares for us — let us not dishonor Him by nursing our doubts, or encouraging our fears — but let us trust in Him at all times, for . . .

His love is true,

His care is constant, and

His knowledge is perfect.

We shall never be without a divine friend — however trying our circumstances may be. We shall never be without a divine guide — however perplexing or difficult our path may be. The care of God is more than the care of all the angelic hosts. If the care of God is not sufficient to preserve, supply, and satisfy us — then nothing is. May the Lord help me to believe this precious truth, to realize it daily, and to pass through the present world under the impression, "I am the object of God's tender, paternal, and ceaseless care!"

"Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous fall!" Psalms 55:22

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows!" Matthew 10:29-31

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Matthew 6:34 "The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him!" Nahum 1:7

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust!" Psalms 103:13-14

04 SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."
Luke 22:42 "I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who has sent me." John 5:30

"And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Hebrews 12:5-7 "The Lord gave — and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Job 1:21 "May Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." Matthew 6:10 Have read of the child, whose parent was teaching him the Lord's Prayer, who, when he came to this particular petition, and was instructed to say to God, "May Your will be done," refused so to repeat it, but insisted on saying, "May my will be done." That might have been in childish ignorance; if not, that was a true child of fallen Adam.

There is a dispute as old as Adam, whether God or man shall have his own will. This petition, rightly used, settles the point every day, in the right and best way. No one can pray sincerely to God, "May Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," without yielding the point in question, and saying, "Lord, not my will — but may Your will be done."

What is the petition, or the thing prayed for, when we say in a right way, "May Your will be done"?

There is the will of God, which to us is secret and unknown. He "orders all things," we are told, "after the counsel of his own will." "His footsteps are not known." This secret will of God is not the subject proposed for our prayers; it is not made known to us as such; and if we attempted to pry into it, we would find ourselves lost and bewildered. We must rather say with Paul, respecting that will of God, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways beyond finding out!" But we have much to do with God's providential will respecting us. This varies with us individually; there are diversities in God's providential dealings — quite as great as the diversities in human countenances. Probably, there are no two individuals on earth whose circumstances in providence correspond in all particulars of their past and present history. What varieties have befallen us as to birth, education, temporal events, health, sickness — in things over which personally we had no control. Regarding the whole of God's providential will toward us, the spirit of the petition taught to us by our Lord directs us not only not to murmur, but . . .

to acquiesce with cheerfulness,

to submit with patience,

to adore with gratitude,

yes, and to seek to turn the opportunities presented by the events in providence, to the glory of God. When God is pleased once to make plain His providential will — then to object or to murmur would be to rebel against Him. When Aaron lost both his sons in one day, we read that "Aaron was silent." There was silent submission, which yet had a meaning; and that meaning was, "May Your will be done." When Eli heard from Samuel the judgments which God was about to bring on his guilty sons, "It is the Lord," said the old man, "let Him do what seems good to Him." In other words, "May Your will be done." When Job lost not only his cattle and his servants, but also his children, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," was the form in which the bereaved patriarch expressed "May Your will be done."

This, therefore, must be our spirit, in regard to all the troubles, afflictions, and adversities — which God in His providence may be pleased to send us at any time. If we had our own natural will granted — we would choose no such things. If we had our own way, we would have, I suppose, a life without a trouble — all prosperity — always health — and riches in abundance. We would never lose a friend by death, and never shed one tear of sorrow. Life would be to us like one bright holiday, with our path strewn with roses — but they must be roses without thorns; our way echoing music — but it must be music without one jarring note. We would be surrounded, I suppose, with the mirthful and the smiling; with not one misery, lest it should interrupt our gladness and joy. But what a contrast is God's providential will towards us — by which man finds himself liable from infancy, to sickness, accident, disease, and death. He is often called to struggle with poverty; with bereavement and a contracting the social circle. He is frequently familiar with tears; finding many a day of life darkened with storms. His path long and stormy — a rough road. He is often obliged to hang his harp upon the willows, as he sits down to weep over his afflictions. When God's providential will in such ways crosses our natural will — what are we to do? We are to say, "May Your will be done!" — and to acquiesce with cheerfulness! Yet not with stoic apathy — we may feel as men, while we submit as Christians. How beautifully is this shown in the conduct of our Lord! He felt as a man: "Father, if it is Your will — then take this cup from Me." He submitted as the exemplar of a Christian! "Nevertheless, not My will — but may Your be done."

Christian believer, be encouraged! The will of God toward you is altogether full of love. "It is not the will of your heavenly Father, that one of His little ones should perish." Ask for grace to know and do His will. Though on earth, yet your will should have more and more of the temper of Heaven. Enter more frequently into the communion of saints; endeavor all you can, by the help of God, to make earth resemble Heaven, by doing the will of God here as it is done there! And then — oh, to be there! We are allowed the aspiration and the hope, "O that I had wings like a dove! Then would I fly away and be at rest!" Well, wait your time; your turn will soon come; "every one in his own order" — some sooner, others a little later. Almost every week we mourn the loss of some who used to do God's will faithfully and consistently, in their sphere, who greatly glorified His name on earth — and who now, "through faith and patience, inherit the promises." In due time — and the time will be but short — all who love and serve God shall meet there, and be with "the spirits of just men made perfect," and with "an innumerable company of angels;" and what is better than all, "so shall you ever be with the Lord," there to do His will perfectly, "as it is done in Heaven!"

"O Lord, create in us clean hearts. Incline them to Your law. Renew our nature in Your holy likeness. May it be our delight to do YOUR will, O God. May we no longer work the will of the flesh. Over all our pains, and all our losses, may we meekly, and with sincere lips, say: The Lord gave,

and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

"My God, my Father, while I stray

Far from my home, on life's rough way,

Oh teach me from my heart to say,

'Your will be done!'

"Though dark my path, and poor my lot,

Let me be still, and murmur not;

Or breathe the prayer divinely taught,

'Your will be done!'

"If You should call me to resign

What most I prize — it never was mine —

I only yield You what was Thine:

'Your will be done!'

"Should pining sickness waste away

My life in premature decay,

My Father, still I'll strive to say,

'Your will be done!'

"If but my fainting heart be blessed

With Your sweet Spirit for its guest,

My God, to You I leave the rest —

'Your will be done!'

"Renew my will from day to day,

Blend it with Your, and take away

All that now makes it hard to say,

'Your will be done!'

"Then, when on earth I breathe no more

The prayer oft mixed with tears before,

I'll sing upon a happier shore,

'Your will be done!'"

"Father, Your will, not mine, be done!"

So prayed on earth your suffering Son,

So in His name I pray.

My spirit fails, the flesh is weak. Your help in agony I seek,

Oh take Your cup away!

"If such be not Your sovereign will,

The wiser purpose then fulfill. My wishes I resign.

Into Your hands my soul commend,

On You for life or death depend —

Your will be done, not mine."

— Montgomery

05 PERSEVERANCE!

PERSEVERANCE!

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus!" Php 3:12-14

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-11

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance" Ephesians 6:18

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Ecclesiastes 9:10 "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18 "They shall run and not be weary!" Isaiah 40:31

Courage! my fellow-travelers. Did I not tell you that the way of the Lord was strength to the upright? The further you advance the better it is — the difficulties vanish, or you no longer mind them. You only prayed for strength to walk — and here are promises that you shall run without tiring. In our way through the wilderness, we are often called to endure trials that require the utmost exertion. We feel ourselves feeble and faint; and, with a peevishness bordering upon despair, cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Sometimes the Lord calls us to services which we think ourselves very unfit for; and we make as many objections as Moses did to his undertaking the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt. But there is no evading them — qualified or unqualified, undertake them we must; and if we have faith enough to follow the Lord fully, we never have cause to complain.

Sometimes the Lord calls us to sufferings which we think we did not deserve; or, at least, which we did not need. Deep calls unto deep, and all His waves and His billows seem ready to go over us! He writes "vanity" or "death" upon our possessions and enjoyments; some are taken away, others are threatened, and all are embittered. In these cases if we know the grace of God in truth — we would gladly prove ourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ, by enduring hardness, by our

steadiness and stability in the way of God.

We wish to imitate our Divine Master in activity and submission. But, alas! We are sadly defective in both — we can neither do nor bear as we ought; every little difficulty stops us, and every little trouble overwhelms us. But, again I say, courage, my fellow-travelers! God has given us many exceeding great and precious promises, and this is one of them, "They shall run and not be weary." To run, in a spiritual or religious acceptance, is to engage with great liveliness and zeal in the duties which God has appointed, and to persist in them with all our powers. And those who thus run under the influences of Divine grace shall not grow weary — the way shall not prove tedious and irksome to them. Bodily labor soon exhausts the spirits, and nature cannot bear up long when it is in its greatest vigor without fresh and frequent recruitings. "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint!" Isaiah 40:29-31 A natural weariness they may be subject to, through the indisposition and decay of this vile body. This may sometimes flatten their taste — I mean as to the present lively feeling of joy and comfort; but the principle of delighting in God does not expire. We read of Jesus himself, that He was weary with His journey, and sat down by Jacob's well, and needed natural refreshment; but this did not lessen His attention to the work which His Father had given Him to do, nor abate His delight in it. Far otherwise. At that time He had a most heavenly time in converting a sinful woman.

Some drops of this oil of gladness there are in the hearts of diligent, fruitful Christians, by which they are enabled to go on from one service to another with ease and rapidity. And though the flesh sometimes flags and tires — the willingness of the spirit still continues, and their love to Christ, and their eagerness to serve Him, are as strong as ever.

Those who run as they ought, have the power and promise of God to depend upon. And what God has once engaged to perform is absolutely and eternally sure. For He can never depart from His word, and can never be at a loss for means to fulfill it.

Now, the Lord God, unchangeable and omnipotent God, has promised that they shall not be weary. He has undertaken to supply them with strength, as much and as often as they can have occasion for. What a precious promise is that: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness!"

I need not trouble myself to look for any other reason. God, who cannot lie, has promised that you shall not be weary — and that is enough.

However, there is a boundless excellence in religion calculated to afford continual refreshment. It is justly remarked of all the delights of sense, that they perish in the using; they are but "as the crackling thorns under a pot." "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world; and the world passes away, and the lust thereof." But spiritual attainments are more permanent. They are "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." There are secret conveyances which continually feed it, so that it can never be drawn dry; the satisfactions to be met with in the service of God, are maintained by a Divine

Hand, and therefore can never fail. The toils and labors of religion have one advantage above all other pursuits — there is no climbing to the top; there is no sounding the bottom; there is no finding out the breadth or length of its excellency and sweetness. The closer I grow to God — the more I see that I do not know Him, nor love Him, nor serve Him, nor enjoy Him — so well as I ought and might. There is more beyond that I can yet attain to, "for now we see through a glass darkly — but then, face to face. Now I know in part — but then, shall I know even as also I am known." And this suggests another reason why we should not be weary — namely, because the faster we run — the nearer we approach to Heaven. Grace is glory begun — therefore, improvement in grace is called being "changed from glory to glory." We all know that those who are running in a race feel new vigor when they come in sight of the goal; and especially the leader. With what a spring does he advance in his last steps to lay hold on the prize! It is the same in the Christian race; the near approach of salvation drives off lazy slumbers, and sets all the powers of the soul in animated motion.

Travelers tell us of some countries, which are so full of aromatic plants and flowers, that they perceive the fragrance at some distance, and are highly refreshed by the pleasing gales. Do you not think it is the same with the Christian traveler, as he bears up towards the heavenly country, of which "the land flowing with and honey" was a figure? Do you not think that the nearer we draw to Heaven, the clearer anticipation we shall have of the joys above? I appeal to my aged and venerable readers, who have been long in the wilderness, and are now almost upon the banks of Jordan — whether the prospects from Pisgah are reviving! Whether you feel your spirits invigorated with the breezes from Canaan! Oh! if dying saints could tell us what they feel, we would have proofs enough. Their countenances tell us, that, while they are walking through the valley of the shadow of death — they are rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

O Christians! with such prospects before us, is it not strange that we run no faster now — that, when we are professedly aiming at Heaven, and Heaven, with respect to some, can be at no great distance — it should be possible for the comparatively trifling concerns of this world to engage our attention; that we do not spurn it from us with indignation; and, like the pilgrim, who ran through Vanity Fair, shutting his eyes, and stopping his ears — I say, that we do not make all the haste we can to get through the wilderness, and be out of the reach of its temptations.

One would wonder that we can think of anything but Heaven — its place, its company, its work, its joys, its glory — are all so animating! At present you hardly know how to believe the promise, you are so often and so soon tired. You can scarcely be engaged an hour, before your jaded faculties complain, and oblige you to break off — so that you can hardly comprehend, at least you never attain to, the full meaning of this precious promise. But in heaven it shall be most gloriously fulfilled, there you shall not rest, day nor night, from the most ardent and elevated devotion! And yet, after millions of years, you shall be as fresh and lively as the first moment you began! Then you will be convinced that it is possible to run and not be weary — and will adore the grace that made you an example of it, "O Father, may it please You to guide and shield Your servant by Your providence. Strengthen me in the hour and under the power of temptation. Support and sustain me by Your might in every conflict. Help me to run and not be weary — to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life!"

06 Christ in the Storm!

Christ in the Storm!

"Your shoes shall be iron and bronze! As your days, so shall your strength be. There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms!" Deuteronomy 33:25-27

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day!" Psalms 91:1-5 "When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet." Proverbs 3:24

"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." Isaiah 12:2 "In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Psalms 56:11

"Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." Mark 6:50

Blessed Jesus, if You are with us — what shall we fear? All we dread is Your removal. Only assure us of Your presence — and let the rains descend, and the waves beat vehemently — none of these things shall move us.

There is something in the situation of the disciples on that dismal night, so correspondent with the experience of most Christians. And there is something so interesting and engaging in their certain, though long delayed deliverance — that a few moments spent in particular consideration of them, may, I hope, be useful.

"And he immediately constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side, unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people." We may easily imagine how unwilling His disciples were to leave Him, and might have expected to find them expressing their reluctance. But we hear no such language. Like the good Centurion, He said to them, "Go! — and they go!" He sent them from Him, but it was only to make His presence more desirable and welcome. God's commands may sometimes seem grievous, and such a path may be marked out for us, as in our apprehensions threatens greatly to interrupt our communications with Him. But if we have patience to wait and see His design — we shall find that in reality His commandments are merciful and gracious, and that He has taken the best means for the accomplishment of our wishes, and the comfort and salvation of our souls.

"And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." How strangely did the blessed Jesus condescend to human infirmities! He hungered and thirsted, He wept and prayed. That we, sinful and necessitous creatures, who abound with wants and miseries, should retire to pray, is no wonder. You find, Christian, that you cannot live without prayer, or enjoy yourself in a

crowd. You cannot go on from day to day, in a constant hurry of business and pleasure, without retiring to commune with your God. That helpless, dependent, sinful creatures, should need to pray often and long, is not at all strange. But what, blessed Jesus, should induce You so often to attend to this duty? Alas! in this, as well as in every other instance, we see that Your thoughts are not as ours. Intercession for others, which makes so small a part of our prayers — was the chief subject of Yours. The weather-beaten disciples we may be certain were not forgotten.

O afflicted, tempest-tossed, and un comforted ones — as distant and unregarded as you may apprehend yourself to be — He is near those who are of a broken heart. While you are struggling with the most formidable and threatening troubles, and all His waves and billows are passing over you — remember that Jesus is in the mountain praying for you!

"When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them." Everything seemed to conspire to heighten their misery and aggravate their distress. The night was dark; the winds were high and contrary; the sea was boisterous; and, what was worst of all, their Master was absent! Had He been with them, however the elements had raged — they might have thought themselves safe. But the providence of God many times calls His servants, His most beloved disciples, to walk in darkness, where they can see no light. He cuts them off from all prospects and possibilities of comfort from any other hand but His own, to teach them to wait upon Him, and to convince them that from Him alone come their help and salvation.

He could easily prevent our sufferings, but He wisely permits them, that He may magnify His mercy in our deliverance, and confirm our faith by the removal of our distress. But though the wind was against them, we find not that they returned to Jesus. Their Master had ordered them to go to the other side, and therefore, in spite of wind and weather, they press forward.

Mark this, O my soul. He sent out His servants to sea, though He foresaw the storm, and perhaps purposely too — that they might be tossed by the tempest. Why are you, therefore, cast down — why are you disquieted within me? Depend upon His grace, follow His directions — and the end will fully equal your wishes.

"About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake." All that long and tempestuous night must the disciples wear out in terror and distress. In the evening there was no appearance of Jesus. But when they had been all night long tossed at the mercy of the waves, and quite spent with toils and fears, in the fourth watch, which was near the morning, Jesus comes to them. This was done that He might exercise their faith and patience, and that their devotion may be more animated, and deliverance more welcome — in consequence of the trying delay.

We own, O Lord, that we are often unable to explain the reasons of Your conduct. What You do — we cannot fathom; but we depend on Your promise, and we rejoice in the thought that we shall know it hereafter.

Christian friend, like these poor disciples, you may be now in the midst of a sea of trouble. The winds roar; the billows glance, and foam, and howl; the night is very dark — and your Savior's absence heightens your distress. But the time to favor you is now fully come. Perhaps it is now midnight with you; but if you hold out until the fourth watch, He will certainly appear for your deliverance.

He came to them walking on the lake. He, who among the mountains was a man — reassumed the imperial royalties of the Godhead. The waves play round the feet of their Master. The tempest that rocks their vessel will not ruffle His robe or lift His hair.

"And he would have passed them by." Surely His absence could not be more grievous than this. But we must not always determine the Lord's designs from appearances. He sometimes appears to turn from us — when He is most attentive to our distresses. If He passes us by, or rather seems as if He would, when we are struggling in the storm — we know that it is not for lack of kindness or affection. He will not — He cannot neglect us! Oh, let us therefore never distrust Him.

"But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified!" What object would have been so pleasant to the disciples as their Master? And yet His presence greatly alarmed them. Has not our ignorance, too, of Jesus, and the way that He takes — led us often to suspect, yes, to run away from our safety, to be afraid of our means of comfort, and to mistake our compassionate and heavenly Friend?

"Immediately he spoke to them and said: Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." This was indeed very seasonable; for, in consequence of their alarm from the apprehension of seeing an apparition, and from the increasing violence of the tempest — they were almost overwhelmed. Until they were thus afraid, He would not speak — but then He could be no longer silent.

If His presence was frightful, His words were comfortable. "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." He was present before, but they mistook Him, and feared — for it is His word alone which can make His presence known. "Take courage!" It is remarkable how frequently exhortations of this kind are used by Christ and His apostles. He is pleased to see His servants cheerful; therefore He has said, "Be anxious for nothing." "Cast all your care upon Him — for He cares for you." "Cast your burden upon the Lord." "Delight yourself in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord always — and again I say rejoice." A thousand passages of this kind might be enumerated to show us how abundantly light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Take courage! O dejected believer, dry up your tears, and cast off the gloom of your countenance, which is so unfitting your character, and so displeasing to your Savior. For the credit of your religion, for the honor of your Master, for the encouragement of your fellow-disciples — be cheerful, and let all the world see that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness.

"It is I!" He does not say who — nor was it necessary. His sheep hear His voice; and we are not of His flock if we do not know Him by His voice, among a thousand. "It is I, the sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth. It is I, who command the winds and waves, and they obey me. It is I, your Lord and Savior, and Friend, whom you lost last night in the mountain, praying for you."

What a seasonable and comprehensive word was that, and how did it calm the tumult of their passions! Blessed Jesus, only say, "It is I!" and in spite of winds and waves and storms, and men and devils, we are safe!

"O You who quiets the storm, and lays to rest the war of elements — bear me in safety across the dark and troubled sea of life. Ever be present with me in your watchful love, and in all the might and mercy of your power. Never leave me — never forsake me. In darkness, be my light. In sorrow, be my joy. In death, be my life. And after death, bring me to that cloudless world, where not a wave of trouble shall ever come; where the din of earth shall be hushed into everlasting

quiet, and the sighs of time shall give place to the songs of immortality!"

07 All Sufficient-grace!

All Sufficient-grace!

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus!" Php 4:19

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake!" Psalms 23:1-3

"The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." Isaiah 58:11

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own!" Matthew 6:33-34

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God!" 2 Corinthians 3:5 And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me!" 2 Corinthians 12:9

There has been a great deal of curiosity to know what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was. There is not, I suppose, one ill which has touched humanity, which has not been dignified and made to stand in the place of this affliction. The apostle speaks of it as a definite affliction. It had a specific nature. He prayed that it might be removed. This is the most we know about it. It is very evident that whatever the nature of the thorn was, it in some way impaired his ministerial and personal abilities. It was a hindrance, an obstruction, a limitation. It was a weakness in which Christ's power was to be made signally illustrious. The severity of his suffering is indicated by the figure; for nothing can be more painful or irritating, in a small way, than the piercing of a thorn, sharp, and harder to be borne than many dull heavy continuous pains. And his repeated solicitations for relief would not have been if the trouble had not been most serious. The desire to get rid of suffering, and the repeated prayer for release from it, were right enough. They were both natural and proper. Paul carried his trouble, whatever it was, to his God. The reply which he received implies that the trouble was not removed. He does not explicitly say this. It is left to be inferred, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations — there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." That was the object of its being sent — to keep down his pride and his vanity. "For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me: My grace is sufficient for you." The passage does not state that it was — or that it was not taken away. It is left to be inferred that it remained, for that was the answer to the prayer. It implies the trouble was cured — but not by extraction. The nerve was killed — although the tooth was not extracted.

There are two ways in which troubles are got rid of: one is by ejecting them, throwing them away, so that they cease to be present with us. The other is by keeping them, but growing them over with such grace and such sustaining power, that they cease to be an annoyance. It was in this latter way that trouble of Paul was dealt with.

"My grace is sufficient for you." That word sufficient has great amplitude in it. It is not simply a promise of help — it is a promise that there shall be enough help to meet the emergency. The power of God has a clear field; and if, when His servants are in trouble, His grace shall be adequate to their needs — shall be sufficient for them — nothing more can be added or imagined. The bounds of such promises include all possibilities of human experience.

It is eminently proper that Christians should bear their troubles to God. There is a general concurrent conviction in the Church, and throughout the world, of the efficacy of prayer. But there are many people whose prayers are rather general, than specific; whose prayers are for the advance of God's kingdom; whose prayers do not go down to deal with the daily cares and troubles of everyday life.

Every Christian believes that he may carry his religious troubles to God. All believe that under great and pressing afflictions, men may resort to God with them. But in the case of the apostle, we have an instance of a trouble that carried him to God, which was neither one nor the other of these kinds.

It is very significant that the figure employed is thorn — not sword, not spear — no instrument that indicates great breadth of power, but a thorn. He was nettled, scratched, pierced. It was a little thing that he was called to endure. It was the annoyance of a pungent thorn, which brought pain — but no peril; which worried him and fretted him; which drew his thoughts away from higher things, and made his life a burden to him.

It was a little thing continued, so that its sum total of affliction was a great deal. That was the thing that thrice the apostle went to God with, praying for release from it.

We may, therefore, in prayer, bring to God minor vexations — all the things that burden and annoy and hinder us in life; whatever takes away our peace and restrains our joy.

Thus the range of this Christian duty is vastly enlarged. Our life is filled up chiefly with little things. Great occasions come seldom. And if we exclude from prayer little things — we may almost as well exclude life itself; for all the way through we live by minutes and seconds, every one of which has its own peculiar relation to our pleasure or pain, our joy or sorrow. There is no thing so minute that God does not take cognizance of it, and consider it. Christ is so united to His people, that there is no trial which they bear, which He does not bear. The continuance of pains and troubles with God's people is not an evidence of His displeasure — but oftentimes the contrary. It makes no difference what the trouble is — we have a right to carry it to God, and ask that it may be removed, or that we may be sustained under it. The compliance on the part of God with either of these conditions is a sufficient answer to our prayer for relief from trouble. Many of our troubles may be removed, and are removed — while many others remain. Many of our troubles are like snow, which starting as snow, becomes rain before it meets the ground; while others are like snow, which falls to the ground as snow, but which, though it lies there all winter long, is sure to melt when spring comes. And to carry the figure forward, as the snow-drop becomes the rain-drop, and

the rain-drop becomes the juice of fruits and flowers — so our troubles, though they fall cold on your branch, melt and carry sap to the root.

There are many troubles that God brings upon His people, or permits them to bring upon themselves — which He does not care to take away from them, and which it is not best for them to have removed. Continued troubles are not, therefore, evidences of God's displeasure. He distinctly affirms, that unless we have such troubles, we cannot be His sons, "You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children". When any Christian is in trouble, God says to him by that trouble, My son, "You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he chastens every one he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" Hebrews 12:5-7 This is the word of God. When your trouble is real and painful, and you carry it to God and ask for its removal, if it abides with you, you are apt to think, "It must be that God is punishing me for my sins, and that He is hiding His face from me." "No," says the voice of God; "so far from it, I am dealing with you tenderly, I am your heavenly Father, I love you, and the trouble that I permit to remain with you is one of the evidences of the affection I cherish toward you."

It is every Christian's duty to have a victory either over his trials — or in them. And this last is the better of the two, and far the more glorious; for it is a higher exhibition of grace to be able to bear trouble, than to get rid of it. To be able to endure is more noble, than to have nothing to endure. Who would not be a Christian, if every time anything touched him to hurt him — prayer, like a shield struck right between the weapon and the sensitive skin, so that he could always avoid pain? But if trouble really wrings the nerve and muscle of a man, and then a heroism is given to him, such that he can afford to have it continued, there is awakened in him a manhood transcendently higher than that which would be awakened if the trouble were removed in answer to prayer. And this is the promise of the Savior — either that it shall be removed — or that grace shall be given with which to bear it. God says, "My grace is sufficient for you. Take trouble and bear it, and I will sustain you under it."

God's sustaining grace produces a sense of our real weakness, which is most wholesome. For we tend naturally to arrogance when we are in strength. Prosperity has the effect to puff us up; and a sense of our weakness is a returning to our reason.

God's grace also humanizes us, and causes us to sympathize with our fellow men. In the day of prosperity, we are apt to feel quite independent of our fellow men; but when the day of trouble comes, we find that we stand greatly in need of them. Blessed are those troubles that make us feel, not only our dependence on God, but our relations to our fellow-men.

God's grace, upon our troubles, develops in us a Divine power of faith and hope. We live by faith. We walk not by sight.

God by trouble, disenchant the world, so that it ceases to be what we tend to make it. We are accustomed to feel its fascination in the flow of ordinary affairs. We are liable to be brought into bondage to the customs and practices and influences of society. But trouble takes off the varnish that overlays the raw material of things, and lets us see them just as they are. Blessed are they

that know how to find Heaven, without leaving the earth. Blessed are they, the door of whose closet, when they shut it, shuts out the world.

"Almighty God, guard me against that anxiety about provision for my bodily needs, which is incompatible with child-like trust in Your paternal care and bounty. Let me not indulge in immoderate concern about the future, but rest for the supply of all things on Your sufficiency and Your grace."

08 Jesus, a Friend

Jesus, a Friend "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine!" Song of Solomon 6:3

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

"Whom have I in Heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" Psalms 73:25-26 "Unto you therefore who believe — He is precious!" 1 Peter 2:7 "There is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother." Proverbs 18:23 Who do you think this Friend is? JESUS! You are right. I was sure you could not hesitate a moment — it is indeed the man Christ Jesus. "There is no other name under Heaven given among men," to which this character so properly belongs. Men of high degree are vanity, and men of low degree are a lie, and men of every degree are broken reeds — there is no dependence upon any of them. They speak fair, and for a little carry it fair — but they fail at last. Either through fickleness or frailty, from insincerity or inability — they fail us when most we need their help. Not so our "elder brother," our Divine friend — He is Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Say now, Christian, could I have mentioned one with whom you would rather wish to spend an hour? To you, I know He is precious — at all times precious.

Jesus Christ is the most ancient friend — this is a circumstance which should greatly endear Him to us. "Your own friend, and your father's friend, forsake you not;" intimating that such a person — one who had been a fast friend to our family for a great number of years — is to be highly valued. And herein Christ infinitely excels the oldest friend we have. Hear what He says of Himself, "When he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." Here was unselfish and unparalleled friendship!

Under the Old Testament we see Him frequently appearing as the "Angel of the Lord," and the "Angel of the Covenant" — with messages of love to His people. But nothing can express it so emphatically as His own word. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them. In His love and in His pity, He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old." Isaiah 63:9

If a perfect stranger were to come to us in our distress, and offer to relieve us, we would hardly know how to trust him. "How do I know who or what he is? Perhaps he only mocks my woe. If he does as he says, I shall thank him; but I am afraid to believe it until I see it."

Now, with respect to Christ, this objection is removed. He is no stranger — He is one that we have been long acquainted with — He has been a friend to the family as far back as we can remember,

and further too. "We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us," how kind He was to them; and we have had a thousand proofs of His kindness to us. And shall I distrust Him now? No! Though my present trial is very heavy, and such as I never experienced before — I can trust Him. "I remember the days of old, the years of the right hand of the Most High," and have not the least doubt that He who has been my father's friend, and my own friend for so many years — will continue to be a friend to me, as often and as long as I shall need Him.

Jesus Christ is an affectionate friend. We often meet with people who make great professions of kindness and respect; nothing but "my dear friend," at every word; and "how glad they would be to serve us." While at the same time we have reason to think they have not merely no real regard — but an actual dislike, and would, underhand, rather do us an unkindness! But Jesus is not one of these. Never was deceit found in His mouth. Whenever He makes professions of love — His heart and hand go along with them. Try Him in those things which are the usual expressions of regard between one friend and another — and you will see how in all things Christ has the pre-eminence. For example — hearty friends mutually sympathize with one another, and take part in one another's joys and griefs. Christ does so, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:15-16

Hearty friends love one another's company — and take every opportunity of being together; and when obliged to separate — they contrive to meet again as soon as possible. Christ does just so. He "walks among the golden candlesticks," and "loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."

Hearty friends seek one another's interest. Do a kindness to one — and the other esteems it as done to himself. Do an injury to one — and the other resents it as done to himself. Christ felt the rage of Saul against the Church, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Hearty friends freely unbosom themselves to one another. And they are mindful of one another, though absent. In all these, and many other ways, Jesus shows Himself a most tender and affectionate friend.

Jesus Christ is a faithful friend. There are some who would be thought very good friends — as they do nothing but flatter us, and commend everything we say and do — though it is never so wrong; and humor us in all our follies and vices. But there is no friendship in all of this. It is sometimes very hard to act the faithful part, on the one side — or to bear a faithful part on the other. But Christ is a faithful friend. "As many as I love — I rebuke and chasten."

Jesus Christ is a powerful friend. We may have many sincere friends — and yet be never the better for them. They may wish us well — but that may be all they can do. They may be poor and feeble, and need help themselves. But if we have a friend as rich as he is kind — then we think ourselves well off — and if ever we come to be in straits, we know where to go for a supply. And who is so rich as Christ? He is appointed heir of all things. "It has pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell."

He is a constant friend. "Having loved his own who were in the world — he loved them to the end!" This is not always the case with human friendships. Sometimes a trifle shall dissolve them. Those

who have been hearty friends for years may become bitter enemies to one another. But where Christ once fixes His love — He never takes it away! His affection does not change with our condition. He never looks shy upon us because we are poor and in distress.

Christ's friendship not only extends itself through all the changes of life — but also through death and eternity. Earthly friends, let them stick never so close — must part at death. If they accompany us to the brink of the grave, there they take their leave, and bid us a long farewell. But Christ is a friend who will stick closest — when all earthly comforts drop off!

If we have such a friend as Jesus — let us show ourselves grateful and affectionate towards Him. He sympathizes with us in all our griefs and joys. Do we so with Him? Do we prefer Him above our chief earthly joy?

09 HOPE!

HOPE!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit!" Romans 15:13

"The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him. The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." Lamentations 3:24-26 "The righteous has hope in his death." Proverbs 14:33 "Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself — even as he is pure." 1 John 3:3

"There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt!" Hosea 2:15

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!" Psalms 42:11

Fellow-Christian, we live in trying times. Nations are convulsed, thrones totter, crowns fall, confusion reigns — and men's hearts are failing them for fear. We cannot but feel — but we ought not to fear. There is enough to make us watch and pray — but not enough to deject or cast us down. The Lord reigns! Our Savior has all power in Heaven and in earth. He directs every event, and will overrule every occurrence — for the fulfillment of His word, and the good of His people. "He works all things after the counsel of his own will!"

Beloved, are you passing through storms, tempests, and trials? Hope in God — whatever your trial may be! Are you sick? He will make your bed, and sanctify your pain. Are you poor? He will answer your prayers, and supply all that you need. Are you sorrowful? He will comfort you, and give you joy for your sorrow. Are you tempted? He will not allow you to be tempted above that which you are able to bear. Are you bereaved? He will be better to you than ten children. He will be a father to the fatherless — and a husband to the widow. Are you in perplexity? He will bring the blind by a way that they do not know — and make your way plain before you.

Whatever may be your trial, whether inward or outward, personal or relative, spiritual or temporal — still "hope in God."

Hope, and do not fret — though the wicked prosper, and everything seems to be against you.

Hope, and do not murmur — for you have a thousand mercies more than you deserve, and more than some of your fellow pilgrims.

Hope, and do not despond; for all things shall work together for your good — your God has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm.

Hope, and do not forebode — for light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.

Hope, and do not complain — for your Lord forewarned you of all that has happened. He told you that in the world you should have many trials and sorrows — but in Him you should have peace.

Hope, and do not dread — no, not even death! He who has delivered does deliver, and He will yet deliver you. He has delivered you in six troubles — and in seven will not forsake you.

Hope in God — for He is gracious, merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. He is faithful to His word. He is full of love to His redeemed children. He is pledged by His word to be a Father to you. He will not fail you, nor ever forsake you. He will surely do you good — and do you good even by your present trials and troubles.

Hope in God; for He has an infinite variety of blessings to bestow. He has all you need, and has it for you. He has all that you ever will want — and He will supply all you need. He has all you can consistently desire, and He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him. He will hear their cry, and will save them.

Hope in God!

He has said to the comingsinner, "I will never cast out!"

He has said to the tried saint, "My grace is sufficient for you!" He has said to the weary, way-worn pilgrim to the celestial country, "Your shoes shall be iron and brass. As your days — so your strength shall be!"

He has said to each Christian, "I will never leave you, I will never, no never, forsake you!"

Hope you in God; for He will do as He has said. Yes, He will do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think! He will make all His goodness pass before us, and show us great and mighty things which we do not know.

Hope in God — for you may; His invitations warrant you.

Hope in God — for you ought; for His commands lay you under obligation.

Hope in God — for you should; for His promises are exceedingly great and very precious!

Hope, then, in God — not in circumstances, however favorable!

Hope, then, in God — not in connections, however encouraging!

Hope, then, in God — not in earthly prospects, however blooming.

Hope in God . . .

when you read His word,

when you attend His ordinances,

when you face His foes,

when you circulate His truth,

when He hides His face,

when your comforts wither,
when your gourds die,
when friends forsake you,
when foes slander you,
when health declines,
when poverty approaches,
when storms gather,
when Satan assaults, and
when death stares you in the face!

Hope — and be not dismayed. Let hope be . . .

the helmet that guards your head,
the anchor that steadies your vessel, and

the friend that holds up your head when the water-floods overflow you. In a word, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances-I should, "Put my hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!"

"O Lord, be my Guide and Guard through the remainder of my earthly pilgrimage. In hope of the resurrection to eternal life, may I live. When I fall asleep, may it be in the blessed conviction, that when Christ shall come to be glorified in His saints — that I shall be found of Him in peace, and be forever with the Lord!"

10 Divine Superintendence

Divine Superintendence

"Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forever!" Psalms 125:1-2

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

"I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. Correct me, LORD, but only with justice — not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing!" Jeremiah 10:23-24 "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings!" Psalms 17:8 "He who touches you touches the apple of his eye." Zechariah 2:8

"My times are in Your hand!" Psalms 31:15

Obviously the changes and vicissitudes of life are in God's hand. Times of worldly prosperity and adversity are in God's hand. He fixes the bounds of every one's habitation, and determines his lot. The rapid and arbitrary changes in the scenes of some men's lives may render this more apparent in their case than in others; but the same hand is equally efficient in all.

God does not, indeed, interfere with the natural liberty of man — yet the final outcomes of things depend entirely on His sovereign will. He weaves the threads of every man's life, so as to constitute it the particular piece that was intended: "The lot is cast into the lap — but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord!"

Such a recognition promotes acquiescence, by a conviction of the Divine wisdom and goodness in all providential permissions and allotments. There we must seek repose — and not from a discovery of the design of each event. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us — it is so high that we cannot attain to it! "God works all things after the counsels of his own will, and gives no account of any of his matters!" We may vex ourselves with the false conclusions we draw, or with our inability to unravel the tangled web of divine providence — but we only show thereby our own folly, and achieve our own injury. We can alter nothing —

"God's own eternal thought moves on

His undisturbed affairs!"

God contents Himself with replying to all our cavils and dictations: "Should it be according to your mind?" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "What I do you know not now — but you shall know hereafter." "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the Potter have the right to make out

of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" Romans 9:20-21

It is but a common word that we speak to our afflicted friends, when we say that God has done it — and because of its commonness it often falls upon unheeding ears, and therefore fails to reach the sorrowing heart. But its very commonness attests its truth by attesting its universal belief. The great thing is to recognize, and to feel it as a truth.

Oh! This of itself were a sufficient antidote for all human sorrow! "My times are in Your hands!" From the agency of God in all human affairs, holy people should derive comfort and confidence. Their preservation, improvement, and welfare — are in the best hands. The appointment of all the events of all lives is with God — so that none can alter His appointment, or hinder it from taking effect. Whatever be the cast of events, they can have nothing in them destructive or overwhelming either to their principles or our happiness.

Look at those events that are of an afflictive nature; they shall proceed, only so far as to afford occasion for the interpositions of an ever-watchful Providence in their support and deliverance — and no further. Our greatest peril is in times of prosperity. Danger lurks most abundantly in scenes the most agreeable to us. We are thrown off our guard by the smooth and tranquil flow of events — and are not watchful to avoid temptation. But these times of prosperity also are in His hands. He dispenses them with guards and checks, and counterparts. Usually He does not give them until He has prepared us by some previous disasters against their seductive influence. Thus, Paul was prepared against the danger of pride, by the thorn in the flesh; and David was prepared against the seductions of royal splendor, by the persecutions of the desert.

How calm and easy might we be, under all events, by the due influence of such considerations! It must be a happiness to the Christian to see the affairs of the world in such good hands. He can thus anticipate order to arise out of confusion, and general good out of partial evil. He therefore can be calm in the midst of tumult. Where others see only a natural agency, or a mass of confusion — he describes the Deity presiding. What perplexes them — makes him adore. But it is a much greater happiness to him to see his own affairs in the hands of God, "My times," he says, "are in Your hand — the hand of one who cannot but notice me, cannot but care for me, cannot but intend my benefit!" To invite and encourage us to this, God graciously assumes our care to Himself, and commands us to leave it with Him, "Casting your care upon him — for he cares for you." What superior people might we be, in indifference to events — were we faithful to our principles! What honor might we bring to our religion by this holy and unruffled serenity, amidst great vicissitudes, or under the approach of violent changes! Our minds firm and unmoved, like the inhabitants of a peaceful island in the midst of a tumultuous sea — would be objects of admiration and envy to the spectators tossed upon its surges. Let us aspire to this tranquility. Should death enter our circle, and take away some desire of our heart at a stroke; as we value the honor of our religion, and the glory of shining in the passive graces — let us refrain from querulous murmurings. We disturb ourselves with perplexing questions respecting the loss of a relative. Why was he singled out? Why did the fatal dart strike him? Why was no relief at hand? Why could no medicines cure him — and no prayers prevail? Thus we make mere circumstances, to aggravate our loss. We blame the physician for lack of skill, the nurse for lack of care, ourselves for lack of foresight, the remedies for lack of efficacy. We blame the air for malignancy — and the disease for

obstinacy. Thus we feed our grief by the supposed avoidableness of the event. But all such murmuring would be checked by a distinct recognition of the Divine sovereignty and agency. "I was silent — I did not open my mouth — because You are the One who has done this!"

Go, then, Christian, cease from your useless grief. Starve it by withdrawing your mind from the topics which inflame it. Keep the fuel from the fire — and it will go out. Go, retract your censures, arouse yourself from your unprofitable languor, look around on the mercies left you, and busy yourself in turning the loss you have sustained to a good account — by making it productive of lessons for the living, and of incentives to your own closer walk with God. He who acts thus, shall collect a gem out of the dust of mortality, and deck himself with laurels plucked from the tomb"

"O Lord, whatever times come to me — let me always recognize Your gracious hand in them. When I am gladdened by times of prosperity — let me be careful to acknowledge the Giver, and to enjoy the gift — in humility and gratefulness. When I am made sad by times of adversity let me remember the moral purpose of every such painful visitation. And when the time of death shall come, when 'the silver cord shall be loosed, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain' — when I am summoned to walk through the dark valley, then may I feel Your Hand upholding me. 'I will fear no evil.' May I be found among the redeemed and the holy, sitting down in the kingdom of my Father, to no more go out forever. And all this through faith, and through faith only — living, holy faith in the Blessed Christ."

"My times are in Your hand,

O God, I wish them there;

My life, my friends, my soul, I leave

Entirely to Your care.

"My times are in Your hand,

Whatever they may be;

Pleasing or painful, dark or bright.

As best may seem to Thee.

"My times are in Your hand;

Why should I doubt or fear?

A Father's hand will never cause,

His child a needless tear.

"My times are in Your hand,

Jesus the Crucified;

The hand my many sins had pierced,

Is now my guard and guide.

"My times are in Your hand,
Jesus my Advocate;
Nor can that hand be stretched in vain,
For me to supplicate.

"My times are in Your hand;
I'll always trust in Thee,
Until I possess the glorious land,
Where I shall ever be!"

11 My Hiding Place!

My Hiding Place!

"God is known in her palaces for a refuge." Psalms 48:3 "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runs into it, and is safe!" Proverbs 18:10

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging!" Psalms 46:1-3 "And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind — and a covert from the tempest!" Isaiah 33:2

"A MAN!" you cry, with visible disappointment. Is all your boasted refuge come to this? A man! What can a man do — what can all the men in the world do to screen me from trouble, or support me in it? Ah, if you can tell me of nothing better than a man — then there is no hope! No! A much less storm than this before me, would crush me to atoms. A man is my hiding-place! You do but mock my woe. If you had told me of Michael the archangel — or if you could have assured me, and convinced me, that twelve legions, or one legion, of angels, that excel in strength, would be instantly despatched for my relief — that would have been something. But to bid me be easy and fear nothing, and then tell me of a man that will undertake to secure me! How can you expect that I . . . Not so fast. When you come to know who this Man is, you will be satisfied that I could not have directed you better, and that it is the same as if I had said, "Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope!" Know, then, that the Man here alluded to is no other than the "Man Christ Jesus" the same as is called the "Son of man" — such a Man as never before was heard of — a Man in whom dwelt all "the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

"This is the Man, the exalted Man,

Whom we, unseen, adore;

But when our eyes behold His face,

Our hearts shall love Him more!"

Now, then, I hope your fears are a little subsided; and you begin to think, that if you are found in Christ — then no storms can hurt you. What a blessed covert Christ is in all the storms through which we pass! Look at that poor penitent, how he labors and is heavy laden! Hark! how piteously he bemoans himself! "Oh, these cursed sins of mine — to what wretchedness have they brought me! These are the sins that have broken my peace, and robbed me of my chief glory, and rendered me loathsome to God and myself. I am afraid to look up to Him, and I am ashamed that

He should look down on me. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?"

I will tell you who — the Man Christ Jesus. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin!" That precious blood has made satisfaction to Divine justice for every sin of every penitent believer — and if you are such, your sins, as numerous as they are, shall be like a debt cancelled, which can never more be demanded — or a stain washed out, which can never be seen more.

"He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities! It pleased the Lord to bruise him — he has put him to grief" — so that the dreadful storm of God's wrath spent itself entirely on the Man Christ Jesus! If you see a thunder-storm gathering, and have time to get to a castle, or some other firm building — then you do not heed the rattling tempest without; let it blow, let it rain, let it thunder; you are dry, and safe, and comfortable. So it is with the soul, when it betakes itself to Christ. Now I am afraid of nothing. "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Now, if God were to frown and threaten to strike me — I would step behind this Man, and say, "Behold, O God, my shield, and look upon the face of your anointed!"

Reader, I hope you rejoice to see what a comfortable and safe hiding-place Christ is in the tempestuous season of conviction of sin. And if there were nothing more to recommend Him, this would be enough. But when this storm is blown over, there are many other blustering winds and piteous tempests which you may expect to meet with.

Sore temptations. Satan is always an adversary, and the soul is always in danger; but there are some particular seasons when the danger is more immediate and pressing. It was such a season that the apostle referred to when he said, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day." Sometimes, like an old serpent — he lies in wait to deceive. At other times, like a roaring lion — he seeks to devour. But whichever way it is, he pushes his temptations with such violence and constancy, that the poor, trembling believer is ready to cry out in despair, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Satan! I never can hold out against such frequent and fierce attacks. Never was anyone so harassed. I cannot resist any longer. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?"

I will tell you who — the Man Christ Jesus. He will be a covert from this tempest too. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!" Hebrews 4:15-16. He encountered the powers of darkness and overcame them, and led captivity captive. This is great encouragement to tempted Christians! You have a friend in Heaven, who ever lives, making intercession for you. While you are struggling below — Jesus is praying for you above. The storm is gathering sometimes a great while before it falls; but we think nothing of it, and go on quite thoughtless and serene, until it darts over our head and surprises us at a disadvantage. The consequences would be fatal, if our ever-watchful Guardian did not foresee the intended mischief, and counter-work the designs of our enemy. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon — Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith does not fail."

Depend upon it, the only safe hiding-place in troublesome times, is the Man Christ Jesus. I do not mean that He will always screen you from trouble, or presently deliver you out of it. There is a

"needs be" sometimes that you should be "in heaviness through manifold trials."

Many, when they are smarting under the rod, are apt to say, "If God had taken away any other of my comforts — I could have borne it. If it had not been for this or that circumstance in my trouble — I should not have minded it."

Why, then the affliction would have done you no good; you would have despised the chastening of the Lord; or, at least, you would not have been roused by it to that humble dependence upon God, which this smarting trial was intended to bring you to. The hour of death is a trying time, which all must pass through. If we escape all other storms — we must come to Jordan at last. And the passage is oftentimes tedious and tempestuous. Many things concur to make it so. The pains, the groans, the dying strife — the parting with houses and estates, with family and friends, and everything we loved in this life — and the thought that in a few hours we are to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ!

Now, what is the best covert in this tempest? Where must a person in the agonies of death look for comfort? The world cannot help him. If he had his house full of gold, it would not give a moment's ease to his tortured body or his aching heart.

Friends cannot help him; they pity him; they weep over him; they wish him safely through — but their tender soothings only serve to increase his distress.

No; he looks on his right hand, and on his left — every earthly refuge fails him. But, "a man shall be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!"

"Jesus can make a dying bed

Feel soft as downy pillows are;

While on His breast I lean my head,

And breathe my life out sweetly there."

Adorable Immanuel! If it had not been for You — such a storm would have crushed me! If I had not taken shelter in Your arms — such a tempest would have hurled me into Hell! Yet You are the Man who was my covert from every storm! Gracious, glorious Lord! I see now that I owe all I was, and all I am — to Your free and boundless love! Great is the mystery of godliness — God was manifest in the flesh!

If I had seen You in the days of Your humiliation upon earth, I might have thought it impossible that You should be God. Now that I see You in Your glory — I wonder how You could be man. But I know You were both — and it is well for me that You were. If You had not been both God and man, I, and millions more, had never been here. Glory, glory, glory to Immanuel, our hiding-place on earth, and our dwelling-place in Heaven. "Let all the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy!" Glory, glory, glory to Immanuel!

12 Secret Prayer

Secret Prayer

"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Daniel 6:10 "And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Matthew 21:22

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express!" Romans 8:26

"But when you pray, go into your closet, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you!" Matthew 6:6 This is a precept of our blessed Savior, who had just declared that it was a proof of hypocrisy to make long prayers in public, "in the streets and in the synagogues." That is, to make prayers in public only. It is a duty to join in public devotion. We are forbidden to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," and great blessings are promised where "two or three agree as concerning anything" which they will ask of God. But many people love to pray "in the synagogue to be seen by men" — who pray nowhere else. They delight in the display and the excitement of a prayer-meeting — but have no relish for the secret closet with God. These are hypocrites. Indeed, they do not pray at all, for the man who does not pray in "secret" — does not pray at all.

"When you pray." Prayer then should have its appropriate season. A portion of time should be set apart for a work of such grave import. It must not be left to chance — to be done when we can do nothing else. We must retire from the world, from business, into our "closets" — to our hearts.

It is a duty which demands recollection, calmness, and honest, uninterrupted self-examination. Many Christians have no set time for prayer. They pray when they feel like it — when they feel drawn to this duty. They think it formal — a kind of spiritual bondage — to obey any rule in their devotions. Many professors satisfy themselves with offering occasional prayers in the midst of employment, or in company, and think that in this way they pray in secret. Others are content with kneeling down by their bedsides when they retire at night, and when they rise in the morning.

Why, if this is sufficient, did our Savior bid us to "enter into the closet and shut the door?" Why all this particularity, this minuteness of detail? Does it mean nothing? Will He accept the fitful, convenient petitions of those who, through indolence, or irreverence, or haste, slight His commandments, and follow their own imaginations?

This, which to many may appear a very small matter, is often productive of very important effects. Partly because the blessed Savior is more likely to meet and "reward" those who render a humble and simple obedience — and partly because people who do not think prayer a work of such magnitude as to require the appropriation of special and regular seasons, will very soon cease to pray altogether. Or if they pray at all, it will no longer be "in spirit and in truth." The Father who

sees in secret, shall see there no real devotion. A few vain repetitions, a few unmeaning confessions, a few "groans," which the heart never utters: the sad countenance, and the religious attitude — are the wretched substitutes which we often present before God, in the place of true spiritual worship. The "reward" of this disobedience, the fruit of "sowing to the flesh," will soon become manifest.

While the humble disciple who follows the command of his Lord with a simple child-like obedience, and night and morning "enters into his closet, shuts the door, and prays to the Father who sees in secret," shall "grow in grace," be strengthened with "might in the inner man," and be thus enabled "to walk in newness of life." The careless professor, who is "wise above what is written," who is too spiritual to heed times and seasons, who only prays when feeling prompts, when sorrow oppresses, or when the voice of the multitude excites or lauds his devotions — becomes as "clouds without water — trees whose fruit withers, twice dead plucked up by the roots!"

How strange that guilty worms of the earth should attempt to prescribe the terms upon which they will receive grace and crowns of glory! How strange that Christians should ever fail to follow the example and precepts of their Lawgiver with a universal and grateful submission!

We are ignorant. We know not how to pray as we ought, nor what to pray for. We lift up our voice to the Great Teacher to "teach us how to pray." He condescends to direct our erring footsteps. He bids us "enter into our closets, and when we have shut the door, to pray to the Father who sees in secret."

Brother, have you found out a more excellent way? What hour of devotion has left the holiest savor upon your soul? When did you feel the adorable Redeemer most near and most precious? When was the world most effectually stripped of its gaudy charms? When did your faith most deeply realize the "unseen?" When did you go forth to your "warfare" as "a strongman armed?"

Doubtless you found these blessings in the secret closet, alone with God. There seek them in all future time. It is Christ's audience chamber, and nowhere else can you come so near to the throne of grace.

"Heavenly Father, teach me how to pray. Teach me to pray in faith; in all humility and lowliness; with perseverance. Teach me to approach Your footstool with filial fear, and with all boldness and freedom of utterance, pleading the promises in the name of Him in whom they all are Yes and Amen. Teach me, O God, to enter into my closet, and shut the door, and pray to my Father who sees and hears in secret. May the Spirit pray within me. May the Savior pray for me. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer! Amen."

"Come to the morning prayer,

Come let us kneel and pray;

Prayer is the Christian's pilgrim's staff,

To walk with God all day.

"At noon beneath the Rock

Of Ages rest and pray;
Sweet is the shadow from the heat,
When the sun smites by day.
"At eve shut to the door,
Round the home-altar pray,
And finding there 'the house of God'
At Heaven's gate close the day.
"When midnight seals our eyes
Let each in spirit say,
I sleep, but my heart wakes, Lord,
With You to watch and pray!"

13 Lost Friends!

Lost Friends!

"I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead." The Hittites replied to Abraham, "Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead." Genesis 23:4-6 "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father." Proverbs 27:10 "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep." John 11:11 "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Proverbs 17:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17

"You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend!" Psalms 88:18

Every one has friends, and every one can sympathize with the joys and pains so indissolubly connected with affection's exercise. But, alas! if it is true that all of us have friends — then the fact is equally universal, that all of us have had friends who are now lost to us forever.

"There is no union here of hearts,

That finds not here an end."

How many bosoms in every corner of the globe are heaving every day with the ready response to this mournful sentiment! Is there one who has spent though but a few brief summers on the shore of time, upon whose mind the world, as it really is, is just beginning to dawn — who cannot already reckon upon someone or more friends whose countenance beamed upon his infant years — now dark in the dust of the grave?

Scarcely have we passed the portals of our greenest youth, when we are startled to miss some of those dear companions who began their pilgrimage along with us. They may not have been taken from our own immediate household, and so the blank is the less felt. But hardly has the wheel of time made another revolution, than, perhaps, the arrow is aimed closer — it strikes home to our very heart — a father or a mother — a brother or a sister; or if none of these, at least a favorite playmate. It may be that one of our own happy dwelling, is hurried away to the tomb — and a new strange weight falls on our soul; and our eyes are dim with incessant weeping.

Ah! reader, let me ask you, have you suffered the loss of any who were very dear to you — and do you not sympathize with these sentiments? Have you a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, a brother, a sister, or a friend, whom once you cherished upon earth — now shut out forever from your sight beneath the churchyard sod. Is there not a yearning of affection over that lost one in your heart now, which never possessed it while the bloom of life was around him?

But, perhaps, yours has been a bereavement of another sort. Parents and kindred are still all around you; but she, the gentle being who was the star of your youth, the bride affianced of your

future career — has withered away from your path, like a flower cut down in the dewy light of the morning. Alas! the cloud of grief which envelops you is indeed a heavy one, and yours are tears whose fountain cannot be dried. Never again can the blossoms of a new love spring forth from the ashes of what is faded and gone. This is no idle dream; it is a truth attested by melancholy experience. The heart may have many friendships — but only one love. Oh! then, let none, in the thoughtlessness of light-hearted youth, or the cold worldly mindedness of maturer years — ever attempt to depreciate the power of affection's first impression.

It has often been to me a subject of wondering meditation, that in so many instances, the dead should be so soon forgotten. Even the most loving and best beloved, with whom we have lived for years in close and endearing companionship — how soon their loss ceases to grieve us — how soon their memories pass almost quite away! This year they are beside us — speaking, smiling, weeping along with us in all the affected sympathy of congenial hearts. The next year, they are lifeless, dead, lost, buried forever out of our sight in the dismal cemetery. Did we love them? Yes, truly — and with our whole souls. Often when we have looked upon them in their health and bloom — have we thought how, deprived of their presence — existence would be a sunless blank. Keeping death and separation far out of view, have we not sickened at the bare idea of sorrow or disease overtaking them, even for one hour? Did we love them? Oh yes, and with a tenderness of which we were ourselves at times almost ashamed, and eager to hide it within the recesses of our own bosoms. We did love them deeply, fondly, faithfully — and yet we behold them no more. Their places by our tables and our hearths are empty — the grave has received its victims. But still we look, we talk, we hope, we fear, we grieve, and we rejoice, very nearly as of yore. We mourned them a while, their remembrance was green upon our souls, and we daily watered its silent garden with the showers of bitter sadness. But gradually, imperceptibly, the sacred impression abated, other objects arose to divert the current of our thoughts, and before we were aware of our strange loss of sentiment — the blessed, the beloved dead had passed away (shall I say) into oblivion. Unfathomable heart of man! Mysterious arrangement of Omniscience! That whom we love with most dearly in life — we should be able to consign to forgetfulness in death.

Let no one tell me that this is an exaggerated picture. Its truth is attested by the most ordinary observation. Though, doubtless, there are seasons when the thought of lost friends rushes in with intense and solemn power upon the soul in sad and solitary hours — when every image of present enjoyment is merged in the broodings of an all-absorbing memory. Yet still, in as far as regards the general tenor of our feelings — it is with living and tangible objects that we seek most to be associated. To mourn for a season is natural — but to mourn always with the same measure of wretchedness — has been wisely denied to the great mass of mankind. There are exceptions, undeniably, to this rule. There are beautiful spirits, to whom the affection of their friends is the very air they breathe; whose tender devotedness, the grave of its idols only consecrates to greater fidelity. These are to be honored and revered, for they are bright, particular stars in the dark hemisphere of more selfish natures. Still they are only the illustrious few, and while we admire their rare excellence — we can scarcely desire that their numbers be multiplied.

"Friend after friend departs —

Who has not lost a friend?" Not one! If we turn for a moment from human to Divine experience — we shall find even there additional evidence how transient are all mortal attachments. The Savior

had those dear to Him, whom He lost, and whom He mourned. He loved Lazarus. Lazarus died, and "Jesus wept" at the sepulcher of His departed brother. Oh, then, let us not frustrate that grace which would make the loss of our dearest friends subservient to our unspeakable gain — so that at last, when the hour of our departure comes, this testimony may be borne to us by those who shall mourn for us: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord"

"Remember, O Lord God, my kindred and friends. Do not allow them to walk in their own sinful ways. Let them all be partakers of Your richest benefits. Oh, draw them all into Your family by the spirit of adoption, that at the great judgment-day we may be found at Your right hand."

14 Angelic Assistance

Angelic Assistance

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it!" Hebrews 13:2 "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." Psalms 91:11 "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." Psalms 34:7

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly!" Hebrews 12:22 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" Hebrews 1:14

See, O my soul, what Omnipotence, under the influence of love and unbounded affection, can do! Could you ever think, when you were so lately a poor groveling worm, a companion of fools, a slave to appetite and passion, and a willing captive of Satan, that you should enjoy such honor — to entertain angels? Does it not greatly endear those glorious beings to us, to hear that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation; and to find that amidst all the troubles and dangers of the wilderness, the Angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him? Is it not a distinguished privilege, that while evil spirits are doing their utmost to distress and destroy us — they are ever ready to confirm; and warn, and defend, and comfort us? Will it not give us an inexpressible pleasure in our dying moments to have a guard of angels around our beds, to take the charge of our departing souls, and convey them safely to Abraham's bosom? Should we not think ourselves infinitely obliged to him that would introduce us to them; as next to the enjoyment of God himself, being one of the highest honors of which we are capable? This then, Christian, has our Savior done; thus highly are we advanced by the gospel. For those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world can die no more, for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God.

We are come to an innumerable company of angels. We enjoy a communication and participation with them, in their privileges, pleasures, and advantages. We are subjects of the same kingdom, citizens of the same city, dear to the same God and Father. We shall behold the same glory, feel the delightful fervors of the same love, receive the communications of the same life, and bear our part in the same hallelujahs.

We are also come to the angels, by our conformity to their tempers and designs. They are called seraphs, from their fervent zeal and activity. And, oh, how does the grace of the gospel assimilate our views and tempers to theirs! As the light of the knowledge of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, has enlightened us — so His love shed abroad in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit, has made us fervent, and constrained us to obedience. Like those blessed spirits, we feel that to please God is our delight. That His glory in the success of the gospel is our prevailing desire; that our services are spiritual; and that we echo back a cheerful amen to the ascriptions of blessing, honor, glory, and power, which are made by the heavenly host, to Him who sits upon the throne, and to the

Lamb forever and ever! This conformity, which is begun on earth, will before long be completed in Heaven — that world of everlasting harmony and blessedness.

We have come to the angels, as we have a particular interest in their esteem and affections. They love us because we love God and the Savior. Our likeness to God, as imperfect as it is, conciliates and confirms their regard. They long for our perfection, and will most cheerfully congratulate our entrance into Heaven. Who can describe the exultations of that day, when the whole family, both in Heaven and earth, shall sit down together? What ecstasies of joy — what transports of affection — what expressions of mutual delight — will that glorious meeting produce!

Come, Christian, awake psaltery and harp. Call upon your souls, and all that is within you, to assist while you are worshiping with angels. Let us tune our harps to the highest strains of gratitude and praise, while we join the songs of that harmonious assembly. They love to see us active, and warm, and cheerful. Those ministers of His who do His pleasure, who hearken to the voice of His word — shame our slothful and reluctant services. While they cease not, day or night, from crying, with a loud voice, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God!" — we may blush at our low intermitting praises, which can scarcely be distinguished from sighs and complaints. Be all life and joy then, O favored child of God. You have reason for it — for all is yours! You are admitted to an innumerable company of angels; endeared to their God; entitled to their happiness; engaged in their services; and bound by covenant to be conformable to them in their temper and practice.

"Bless the Lord, you his angels — who excel in strength, who do his commands, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, all you his hosts, you ministers of his, who do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion! Bless the Lord, O my Soul."

15 Rest in Heaven!

Rest in Heaven!

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!" Revelation 7:14-17
"Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Revelation 14:13 "For you shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days." Daniel 12:13 "There remains a rest for the people of God!" Hebrews 4:9

There is a rest beyond the grave, of which the Sabbaths of earth and the peace of the renewed soul, are the emblems — namely, the rest of Heaven, which has nothing to do with death, but that it follows it. Death is the most remote thing from it — for all is life there. No deadly winter gale breathes upon its verdure, or blanches the cheek of the sufferer. No graves are opened there, making still wider chasms in the domestic circle and the widowed heart. No cemetery is there with its gloom — for gardens bright with lilies, and all "the painted populace of flowers" — fill the paradise of God. No mourners go along the streets when the golden bowl is broken, and the silver cord is loosed, and the wheel is broken at the cistern — for troops of young men and maidens, companies of redeemed ones, clad in robes of white, are the only dwellers there. No funeral hymn or elegy is chanted there — only oceans of joy and anthems of praise. The churchyard yews and the sable cypress are there unknown — the foliage of the upper Eden being that of the trees of life planted by the river of the water of life. Life! it is the life of life — life without the seeds of decay — life without stint — life without end. And this is the rest of Heaven; the perpetual Sabbath of the eternal skies. This is a topic, from its loftiness and infinitude, only perfectly comprehended by the infinite mind — and therefore, very disadvantageously discussed by a finite one. Nevertheless it is a topic, the most inadequate discussion of which cannot fail to do us good. By such meditations the heart is made better, and desires after Heaven are enkindled upon its stony altar. With the older saint we cry, "Oh that I had wings like a dove — then would I fly away and be at rest!" With the apostle Paul, we have a "desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better!"

Accompany me, then, with your prayers while I seek to produce these passionate desires for Heaven in your renewed bosom — by painting its joys and occupations under the figure of a Sabbath. "There remains therefore a rest [or Sabbath rest] to the people of God." To the persecuted and often faint-hearted Hebrew believers, this must have been a delightful revelation — that all which they suffered now, would before long give place to peace and joy, and the very pains they at present endured would only enhance the more the satisfaction to come. And so must it be to us.

The turmoil of the earth harasses us;
the labor of the earth wearies us;
the vanity of the earth disappoints us;
and the sin of the earth haunts us —

and we look forward to release from these afflictions with all the eagerness of the starving for food,
or of the prisoner for the light.

Heaven is a PERFECT rest — a rest undisturbed by the opposition of sinful people or principles, the ebullitions of our own corruption or impatience, or those necessities for physical labor which are so fruitful a source of weariness on earth. In the sweat of our brow we now eat our bread — whether it be by manual labor or by the application of the mental powers. But in Heaven all this will cease. Exertion will cease with the cessation of its necessity. The leaven of toil will be swept away from our homes, because the paschal feast of eternity is begun. The occupation implied in the weary working days of earth is over — because the Sabbath that was to follow has dawned. The anxiety about obtaining provision, which wore down our strength and spirits here — the labor to secure it exhausting — the amount, when gained, scanty and insufficient — the labor of toil, which is connected with the original curse — all that is done away, and ample supplies, various provision, inexhaustible abundance is furnished for every soul. In that rest, there is . . .

appetite without hunger,

fullness without satiety,

desire without pain, and

enjoyment without remorse.

Physical inconvenience is unknown there — pain, sickness, death are forever gone. Racking rheumatism and bloated dropsy, consumption that pales the lamp of life by degrees, and cholera that extinguishes it in a moment; the thousand-hazarded life of infancy; the tottering, toothless, decrepitude of old age — all that gnaws, wastes, kills, has no existence in Heaven. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!" Revelation 7:16-17. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4 But be it understood, nevertheless, that this is not absolute rest, inactivity, and indolence. It is the cessation of woe — not work; the absence of pain — not the absence of employment. As the quiet of our earthly Sabbath is consistent with the occupations of that hallowed season — as works of charity and duty are still shedding on that day their flowers over the weary life-track of humanity — so is the rest of Heaven consistent with unceasing occupation, study, praise.

Thus God rests in Heaven — but there is no abatement of the energy of Omnipotence. And Jesus has "entered into His rest" — but only the rest of a Priest and of a King. "He ever lives to make intercession for us!" The rest of the angels is constant service, prompt obedience, reverential

homage, and unceasing contemplation of the works of God and the wonders of redemption. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation?" And the rest of the saints is worship, learning, and enjoyment. "They rest not day and night, crying — Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" "

We prize Heaven as a SACRED rest. When speculating about the ingredients of our cup of bliss in the eternal world — we may be right or wrong in any one of ten thousand different suppositions; but there can be no mistake when we assert holiness to be a chief ingredient. This is the passport to admission — this is the condition of existence there: "Follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful — but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." The only disqualification for Heaven, in fact, is unholiness. The door of Heaven is wide enough to admit poverty with its rags, and disease with its loathsomeness — but no sinner with his sins. The law is positive — the exclusion is certain! No evasion, palliation, or excuse availing to exempt. The law of happiness in Heaven is the same as the law of happiness on earth — to be happy you must be holy. The robes in Heaven are all white; the souls are all regenerate — "the just men perfect."

We rejoice in Heaven as a PERMANENT rest. It "remains" and will always be remaining. In delightful contrast to our earthly Sabbath, which gives place to renewed toil, and to our life, which falls before the sickle of the great harvester, Death — the life and joys of the heavenly Sabbath know no end. Where is the Christian who has not had the fountain of its satisfactions frozen over by the chill intrusion of death? Is there a house that death has not visited? Is there a hearth which displays not its vacant chair? Is there a chamber that echoes not with the voice of bereaved Rachel's weeping, because their loved ones are not? Well sang the poet,

"Death is here, and death is there,

Death is present everywhere;

All above, around, beneath,

Is death — and we ourselves are death! But all this is over and past in Heaven. There is no death, and no end — no end to anything. This is difficult, indeed, to understand, but easy to believe. Joy has no end, service no end, and rest no end. The Sabbath glory never dims — the Sabbath breeze never hushes its music — the Sabbath convocation never disperses. For the people of God, this rest remains. The people of God — the penitent, contrite, and converted. The people of God — the believing, humble, and holy! The people of God — "the saint's everlasting rest," as Baxter has called it — not the unrepentant sinner's everlasting rest. The world to come has no Sabbath rest for the unrepentant sinner. Here on earth, he would have no Sabbath — there in eternity, he shall have no Sabbath, no rest, no light, no happiness — nothing but unrest, disquiet, misery, "the blackness of darkness forever!" "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest."

Reader, hearken and receive the consolation with which we are comforted of God: "Come unto me," says the compassionate Savior, "all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls." This is the first step — the prelude to all that follows. Rest to the soul — rest in Christ; and then follows — oh, rapture beyond expression! Oh, bliss without alloy! "The rest

that remains for the people of God!"

Oh, blessed rest — when we rest not day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" When we shall rest from sin — but not from worship! When we shall rest from suffering and sorrow — but not from joy! Oh, blessed day! When I shall rest with God — when I shall rest in knowing, loving, rejoicing, and praising Him! When my perfect soul and body shall together perfectly enjoy the most perfect God! When God, who is love itself, shall perfectly love me, and rest in His love to me, and I shall rest in my love to Him! When He shall rejoice over me with joy, and rejoice over me with singing — and I shall rejoice in Him!"

16 The Living Dead!

The Living Dead!

"Whoever lives, and believes in Me, shall never die!" John 11:26

"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body!" 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 "Because I live — you shall live also!" John 14:19

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling." 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him!" 2 Timothy 2:11

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory!" Colossians 3:1-4 The very slender hold which Christ has taken of our life, is nowhere shown so much as in the wantonness of our grief at the death of our saved beloved ones. Why should they not die? Were they given to us that we might them here on earth forever? Does no one else love saved beloved ones but ourselves? Are we to employ our love as chains and bonds, that we may bind them forever to the earth? Shall we restrain them here on earth with our selfishness?

They were sent into life as into a war — and shall we mourn that the battle is quickly fought, so that it is victorious? They were sent into life as scholars and apprentices — and shall we mourn that their apprenticeship is soon ended, and their indentures broken; and they are so soon graduated, and their diplomas awarded?

I have never seen any man hanging death-crape upon trees, because the blossoms had fallen, that the fruit might swell. But I see people putting crape upon their doors, and upon their persons, because summer has come sooner to their godly companions than they thought. The advance of summer is not terrible to the natural world — why should the advance of Heaven be terrible? What is dying but blossoming? All the winter long the blossom-bud was hidden in the tree. The spring brings it forth. And, while we live in this world our real life and beauty are hidden. While living, we are buds which, from the chilliness of the air, cannot open. When men have lived long, and outlived strength and activity — we do not marvel that they die — but we think that early dying is mysterious. That God might enfold the year, and leave not one moment without a blossom — He has appointed flowers for every period. Some things are made to blossom in earliest spring — and some in later spring; some in early summer — and some in midsummer. Multitudes are appointed for the autumn — and some God sets to put wreaths on the very brow of winter. In like manner, there are different periods of blossoming out of life. We do not know what is the secret work that

goes on within. Nowhere else is our ignorance of the spiritual realm, and of the relation of our inward life to it more apparent — than in judging of men's fitness to live or die. The conditions of life hereafter rule mightily; many who to us, would seem ripe and ready to go, are kept back — while many that seem to us unfinished and unfit for spiritual glory are transplanted. But the relations of each particular nature to the future state; their susceptibility to the influences that then shall surround them; their aptitudes to moral goodness and harmony; their power of assimilation; their impressibleness under other circumstances — we do not know, and do not even suspect. And to judge of these things by any earthly tests or rules of experience, is most surely gross and blundering folly. Often the young have more true symmetry of spirit in them, than old men. Many seem less fit to die — the further they are removed from childhood. The very data upon which judgments are formed in these matters, are not within our reach. We have no tools even for a calculation. In respect to our earthly relations, observations and experience may make us wise; but our relations to the invisible and the future — must always be tenuous, mysterious, hidden.

We mourn as those who have no hope — whereas our mightiest griefs should be embosomed in hope and joy! With what frantic sorrow do we beat ourselves — only because our heart companions are suddenly translated into all honor, and nobleness, and purity, and ecstasy of joy! When the golden gate is opened, and our loved ones pass through, we may be sad that we are left in the dreary wilderness — but not that they have entered the city of their coronation! We may mourn that we are alive — but not that they are dead. Living is death — dying is life. The holy dead are the truly living! We are not what we appear to be. On this side of the grave we are exiles — on that side, we are Heaven's citizens. On this side of the grave we are orphans — on that side, we are beloved children of God. On this side of the grave we are disguised and unknown — on that side, we are revealed and proclaimed as the sons of God!

If we could but break down by faith and imagination the barrier which our senses interpose; if we could but move through the celestial air, beholding the fulfillment of God's promises; if we could but assure ourselves of the lustrous beauty, the glorious largeness and liberty, the wonderful purity and joy of those whom God has called and crowned with immortality — then unless we were petrified with selfishness, we would lay aside our sorrow, and break forth with thanksgiving.

Since only days and weeks are between us and those who have gone before; since joy and sorrow alike, and the whole course of earthly experiences are bearing us straight onward to the same abode — it would seem the very abandon of unregulated grief, the very fantasy of earthly folly — not to find consolation and patience, yes, and a sobered gladness, that we are known in Heaven by our forerunners. Our departed loved ones are the hands by which we take hold of Heaven. By these tendrils, we clasp it and climb thitherward. And why do we think that we are separated from them? We never half knew them. Until they die, men are not in a condition to be known. That which belongs to men does not come to them in this world. We are kept from each other, while yet we live together in life.

We are all of us traveling, then, to the land of eternal acquaintanceship. We are not unpopulating our houses; we are not sending our saved friends away from home. We are all traveling to that realm where we shall know even as also we are known. We move faster as every cord is loosed that bound us to earth — faster as every heart that we loved draws upward. Let us rejoice.

And, as in autumn, the very earth prepares for death as if it were its bridal, and all the sober colors of the summer take higher hues, and trees and shrubs and vines go forth to their rest wearing their most gorgeous apparel, as ending their career more brightly than they began it — so let our hearts cast off somber thoughts and sable melancholy, and clothe themselves with all the radiance of faith, and with every hue of heavenly joy. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!"

"Holy Father, take me into deathless union with Yourself; grant me the fellowship of Your Spirit; quicken my soul into a more divine and glorious life, and perfect in me Your most blessed will! Amen."

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