

QUIET TALKS WITH THOSE WHO WEEP

by Samuel Dickey Gordon

Gordon's pastoral work of comfort for those experiencing grief and loss, addressing breaking hearts with Scripture's promises and using metaphors of storms and tears to explore how pressure and grief can produce spiritual refinement through Christ's compassion.

7 Chapters

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A Foreword

There are lone hearth-fires today, so many! And those who sit beside them, with the empty chair, cannot restrain the tears that will come.

Yes, here's the Bible close by. But there's a heavy mood on that affects one's eyes so. One sits alone so much.

There is some One unseen, just here, within reach. But somehow we don't realize His presence; it does not seem real.

If we would quietly put a foot on the next step up, and then rise up to that foot, we can recognize His presence: it is real.

Realizing is blessed, but. . . rare. It belongs to the mood; to the feelings. It is dependent on weather conditions and bodily conditions.

The rain, the heavy fog outside, the poor sleep, the twinging pain, the letters in the last post. . . these make one's mood so much; they go so far in controlling the feelings; they seem to blur out the realizing.

But there's something a little higher up than realizing. It is yet more blessed. It is independent of these outer conditions, whether of climate, or post, or market, or tenement of clay.

It is a something that abides. It abides regardless of these things of such great influence. Then the fire always burns cheerily and warmly, regardless of wind or fog or Chimney conditions.

It is this: recognizing that Presence, unseen, so wondrous and quieting, so soothing and calming and warming. This it is that clears your eyes and brains, and warms your heart, and steadies your feet, and loosens out the song.

Recognize His presence . . . the Master's own. He is here, close by; His presence is real. Recognizing will help realizing, too, but it never depends on it.

This is up on the higher level, the simple child-faith level that takes the Master at His word, and sings because of what He says.

This simple homely talk is written after almost a year of this world-nightmare of war, in the midst of the terrible intensifying of horrors that the past weeks have brought.

It is written with letters near by from dear friends who sit in the dark shadows. The mood of the war is everywhere, an ever - changing, but never - easing mood. One simply cannot escape it.

But one's hand can still hold hard to His hand amidst the swirl and suction of the rising waters. And He keeps your feet steady. That's everything.

Yet the war but intensifies the sorrow for loved ones gone, intensifies it tremendously, overwhelmingly . . . yet only intensifies it. For that sorrow knows neither calendar nor map. It was here, everywhere, before the war began.

It will remain long after the prayed-for peace has been at last securely signed and sealed. Everywhere and always, pain of spirit eats in, hearts break, bonds snap, loneliness wraps in its clinging folds.

And so is the comfort always here. Always and everywhere the truth remains the same, a bit of rock for the feet, a warm handclasp in the dark of a strange place.

Aye, more, immensely more, the Truth is a Presence, not a thing, a fact, a statement. Some One is present, a personal Saviour, a warm-hearted Friend, an allpowerful Lord.

He is present, and all He is in Himself is always available, everywhere. This is the essence of truth. He ... He . . . is that part of truth which remains unchanged.

And this groundwork of truth, this One, Himself the truth, this ... He .. . clean overweighs all the rest. Love outdoes sin. Gladness has a big margin over sorrow. The morning when it dawns will make the night be clean forgotten.

And this is the joyful truth for weeping hearts everywhere, whatever be the hand that has drawn the tears; by whatever stream it be that your weeping willow is planted.

Chapter 1: Breaking Hearts

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“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.”—Psalms 34:18.

“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”—Psalms 147:3.

. . . My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”—Psalms 61:2.

“Calm me, my God, and keep me calm;

Let Thine outstretched wing

Be like the shade of Elim's palm,

Beside her desert spring.”

Horatius Bonar

It is always raining somewhere. Tears are ever falling. Always some heart is breaking. And the rain beclouds other skies. And the tears wet other eyes. And the breaking hearts make other hearts bleed.

Yet there would be no rare beauty at rising and setting of sun, holding our eyes in grateful praise, were there no clouds. And there is no rainbow in the skies that can compare with the one made when the dew-drops of the heart reflect the rich colours in the light that shines out of the eyes.

And the hearts that break are, in their very breaking, coming into the most real touch with the heart of all the race, and with the heart of Him Who died of a broken heart. The only healing salve for hearts that are breaking comes out of hearts that have broken.

The pressure on the clouds becomes greater than they can bear. So the rain comes. And the pressure is relieved. And the earth is refreshed. It gives grateful thanks in greener grass and browner soil and more beautiful colouring of flowers, while all the air is fragrant with a new delicious freshness.

The pressure of the heart on the eyes becomes more than they can stand. So the tears come, pressed out by heart action. And the pressure on the heart is relieved. And the eyes are bathed. They're cleaner now and cooler and clearer. There is truer, stronger sight.

The pressure of life's ills upon the heart is oft times more than its sensitive walls can withstand. They quiver and tremble, and give way, or seem to, or feel to; even while the outer surface may be fairly well under a proper control. But under all is a broken or breaking heart.

Yet no heart was ever broken past repair. Though repairing seems quite utterly impossible while the breaking bewilderment is crushing you. For the pressure is relieved in the very breaking, and need never never regain its breaking strength.

And the warm heart-juices loosened out under the terrible pressure have a softening influence. They mellow and ripen and grow into richer fineness all the heart qualities of the character.

They have healing virtue. They cure the unconscious hurt of hardening made by life's easy unconsciously-selfish flow. They heal the heart whose breaking presses them out. It becomes a better heart because of the healing touch of its own breaking juices.

And blessed influences go out, as mellowing, soothing, healing, fragrant balm, to the countless other broken, breaking hearts, waiting wearily on the crowded street for help.

No heart ever broke past mending. It may not be mended. But it can be, even though you feel it can't while the breaking's going on. The worst broken heart was the one that broke on Calvary. The tremendous strain and stress on that great heart was too much for even uncommon human restraint. That heart broke. No heart ever broke so, so utterly, so overwhelmingly, as that.

And so no heart need ever break so. For that heart, the heart of hearts; and that break, the break of breaks, gave out under pressure the wondrous salve that can mend up every other broken heart, and knit together the edges of every other break.

Since the heart of our Lord Jesus broke, our breaking hearts can be repaired.

The weather has been very stormy of late, the clouds the heaviest and blackest, and the downpour the greatest. It is not too much to say, very thoughtfully, that we've been going through the worst storms this old earth of ours has ever known.

The massing of black clouds, the horrible growling of the thunder so near, the terrific driving of the winds, the furious lashing of the waves, the drenching of the rain, have broken all records.

Tempest and hurricane, typhoon and simoon and cyclone, seem all rolled into one, and to have got a momentum terrific beyond words or imagination or experience.

And the wreckage is everywhere. Broken homes, broken families, broken hearts, broken plans, broken laws, broken traditions, broken honour, — was there ever such breakage! No; sober second thought looks and thinks back and solemnly says, "Never such breakage and wreckage."

And tears have come in floods till the tear-ducts seem to have run their waters clear out, and only dry eyes stare blankly, hopelessly out over the distracting beach of life.

Will the sun ever shine again? Will the clouds ever break? Will the storm ever spend itself, and calm come again? And the questions themselves seem but an intenser way of underscoring a negative, and crying out despairingly, "Never."

Yet this is not the full answer, nor the right answer. The feelings may not be allowed to override the judgment. The tears must not blind the eyes to what is there to be seen. The storm is not all there is to be seen, though its horrible growling thunder is so deafening and so close.

Chapter 2: If The Grief Died Too

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“And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and ministered unto Him.”—Matthew 8:15.

“When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”—Job 34:29.

“Be still (let go) and know that I am God.”— Psalms 46:10.

“Yes, keep me calm, though loud and rude

The sounds my ear that greet;

Calm in the closet’s solitude;

Calm in the busy street.”

Horatius Bonar

Let us see. Has every thing been done that can be done? Is the boat as shipshape for the gale as we can make her? Are the ropes all taut and well knotted? Are the sails set best for the winds that blow?

Have we done the best to meet the hour’s need, the best of gold and honour, yes, and of . . . steady within there, steady ... of one's own loved ones, one’s own heart blood? Has the best been given and done that can be?

Yes? Ah, yes! Yonder vacant room, and this empty chair by the fire, and at meal-time; the memory of the voice that speaks not, of the old laugh that rings not, of the gentle smile that comes not, of the step that is ever missing; and that little pile of letters there: these all answer a mute emphatic, “Yes.”

Well, then, it may ease the waiting time a bit to sit down, and, in between prayings, talk awhile in slow, hushed tones. Aye, and it will do more than ease waiting time. It will ease the tension on the heartstrings.

The thing that hurts the very most, down under all, is the personal loss. The feeling here is too deep and intense for speech. Always there is someone who is not here. There's the one who doesn't come now.

“The lights are out

In the mansion of clay;

The curtains are drawn,

For the dweller’s away;

He silently slipped

O'er the threshold by night,

To make his abode In the city of light."

A bit of ourselves has gone. The absent one is a part of one's very self. We're not all here.

There's a strange, bare, gone feeling.

A part of the life has gone. A part of the inner heart of one is quite gone. There's only an empty space ... so empty . . . where he was. And the emptiness aches, a dull heavy aching, even in sleep.

There isn't even a place to put flowers out maybe, on a little hilled-up sod, under a drooping elm. This personal part is the part that hurts most. This is where the thing comes closest and cuts deepest. This it is that seems to hold the break in the heart from getting together and healing.

"Here in this leafy place quiet he lies,

Cold with his sightless face turned to the skies;

'Tis but another dead—all you can say is said.

"Carry his body hence—kings must have slaves;

Kings climb to eminence over men's graves.

So this man's eye is dim; throw the earth over him.

"What was the white you touched there at his side?

Paper his hand had clutched tight ere he died ;

Message or wish, may be—smooth out the folds and see.

"Hardly the worst of us here could have smiled—

Only the tremulous words of a child—

Prattle, that had for stops just a few ruddy drops.

"Look, she is said to miss, morning and night,

His—her dead father's—kiss; tries to be bright,

Good to mamma, and sweet—that is all,

' Marguerite.'

"Ah, if beside the dead slumbered the pain!

Ah, if the hearts that bled slept with the slain!

If the grief died! — But no — Death will not have it so." (Austin Dobson.)

And there's the broken future. So much of the tomorrow of one's life was bound up in the one who isn't here.

It is as if all the morrows, that were so bright with radiant sunlight, and clustering with buds and roses, and rippling with joyous music, and fragrant with all the sweetest subtlest fragrances of life, as if all these morrows were clean wiped out with one fell stroke.

And only a dull heavy laden-skied today remains, with intervals of nights for sleeping; if sleep will come. And a routine of goings around to ease the sharper edge a bit; but just today; no morrow; the future is dropped quite out.

Future, plans, sunlight, flowers, fragrance, music ... all quite gone, for he is gone. Only to-day's dull round, heavy steps, drab skies, wintry chill, clinging fog. The cherished plans have gone. This adds its sting to the personal loss.

Chapter 3: The Absent One

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“He leadeth me beside the waters of quietness. He refresheth my life.”—Psalms 23:2-3 (Free translation).

“Thy rod and thy staff (tokens of His presence) they comfort me.”—Psalms 23:4.

“Calm in the hour of buoyant health,

Calm in my hour of pain;

Calm in my poverty or wealth,

Calm in my loss or gain.”

Horatius Bonar

Yet . . . there is something more to be said. Sit still, my heart, and let me try to see all there is to be seen.

Let us stir the fire a little, that what blaze there is may flame out. And let us draw our chairs up a little closer, for there is surely some warmth here by this fire, more than we are getting.

He is not here. That is true. Yet he is somewhere. The precious outer casket that his spirit carried about, that is . . . well it is not here. We may not know just where, some of us. But then he is not with it He . . . where is he? the real be that used that precious bit of vitalized clay?

Now let the answer to this come, and linger, until it is seen as big as it really is. He was trusting Christ as His Saviour, was he not? Swift down under all you know ... in his heart this, was his trust, was it not?

And possibly you cannot put your eagerly reaching out, trembling finger, on any particular word or act or even bit in the letters yonder.

Yet one remembers how in the thick of the trenches, and of the awful smoke and fire and din there's been a most unusual sense of an unseen Presence brooding.

And men's hearts, once so thoughtless, have been strangely caught and hushed. And your prayers in Jesus' Name have gone up so many times. And prayer does not fail.

And one remembers that whenever there is the half-turning of an eye upward, homeward, in longing and desire... that's a little something that our Lord yearns for and reckons with, and quickly sees and eagerly responds to.

Some come in at close of day, as the tired-out child creeps into his mother's soft lap, wanting only rest, and coming for it to the one place. And we know the mother never fails her child's acted plea.

And would He?

This is the one decisive thing. Our one hope is the blood of our Christ. Precious old family ties, dearly-cherished traditions, personal accomplishments and achievements, treasured possessions all fade away now. And this, this thing that Christ died for us, this is the one thing that stands out.

And if this blessed hope is his, the absent one's of whom we think this hour, if under all there was a little of the real thing of this, enough for Him, our Lord, to see, whose love makes His eyesight so keen, then, ah! then, there's another little chapter to add to our story.

This answers our question: Where is he? the real he? We sit very still and let the answer come into our inner spirit-ears, as quiet and clear, as sure and undoubted, as the title-deed to an estate: He is in the presence of our glorified Lord Jesus.

Now as we sit here, as we stir the fire to get more warmth out to help the inner chill, even now he is in that wondrous Presence. He has been blessedly changed. He is in full rhythm of spirit with things up yonder.

He is looking into the face of our Lord Jesus, into those eyes so kindly and gentle; and the Lord is smiling into his eyes. And he answers that wondrous smile with his own smile. The two are in touch of spirit.

Is not this enough, alone, to bring sunshine down through these low-hanging clouds, till it reaches clear in, and warms up where the wintry chill is?

But there's more to add, much more. He is so happy up there. There's the music of that upper world. He is listening, caught and held, thrilled and thrilled. For it's a great place of music, of singing, up there.

Was he fond of music? Well, he never heard such soft rich harmonies as reach his ear now. Maybe he didn't know much about it, though he liked to hear it.

Well, he's being swept by it now, even as a fragrant breeze from over a field of wild roses in the early summer blows softly into one's face, at times, and sweeps his spirit away into subtle wordless communion with nature and with God.

And up yonder there is a throne. There is a rainbow of exquisitely soothing quieting green round about the throne. And a wondrous One in a soft blaze of blinding light is sitting on the throne, looking out over all, there and here.

And round about are the hosts of angels with their pure strong faces and winsome presence, coming and going, some hastening up from the old earth to tell of their last errand and get further instructions.

And some are eagerly hastening away down to the old earth with glad faces and outstretched hands, to guard and minister and help down here. And they're singing, always singing, softly singing praises to the King, as they quickly, eagerly go and come.

And there are the redeemed ones of earth, a wondrous company from all the ages, and all the nations, gathered about the throne, talking, ministering, doing errands, busy with glad tasks,

singing, always singing, and with such glad faces.

Over yonder is Enoch still walking with his Friend, and Moses with his face shining more softly than ever, and gentled Elijah, and Isaiah with vision clearer than ever, and Paul down on his face again, but in wonder and worship, all softly singing.

And here are some that he ... our loved one . . . knew. The one he loved so tenderly, and who slipped away that early dawning from your clinging grasp and his . . . they're together now in gladdest reunion.

And the children are there, hosts and hosts of them, babies of months, and babies of wee years, and growing children each tenderly cared for, and each growing, ever wondrously growing in that wondrous atmosphere, and all singing, always singing, whatever else may be going on.

And he is part of all this. And he is growing too; growing in his mental powers, growing in his understanding of the reason of things, growing in knowledge, and in the fine graces of strength and beauty. And most of all growing in love, which is the perfection of strength and beauty and life.

Chapter 4: The Throne View

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“Be silent to God, and let Him mould thee.”—Psalms 37:7 (Luther’s translation).

“He that goeth aside to sit quietly in the secret place with the Most High, will find Him coming over so close that this man shall be lodging under the very shadow of the Almighty.” — Psalms 91 : i (Free translation).

“Calm in the sufferance of wrong,
Like Him who bore my shame;
Calm, ’mid the threatening, taunting throng,
Who hate Thy holy Name.”

Horatius Bonar

But does he know about us down here; about just us, here by the old family hearth-fire?

And does he know about how things are still going on down here, the awful war still on and even getting worse, the distress and sorrow, the hunger and suffering, the awful moral tragedies, and . . . and . . . the loneliness, and . . . all the rest of it: does he know?

And if he does how can he be happy? How can one ever be happy again who knows even a little of what has happened just this year . . . how can he?

And the rush of uncontrolled emotion comes anew. And the break in the heart begins bleeding afresh. And one of those great flushes of feeling sweeps over you as you ask.

You may let it out. Some can and do. You may keep it, most of it, under the lock and key of strong restraint. Some can and do. And they feel the wear on the inner wheels all the more.

How can he? . . . They up there . . . how can they? Well, you see, you have dropped your eyes a little, until you see only part, the distressing weeping breaking part. But they can see all. That’s the answer to your “how?”

There’s a throne up yonder. They are getting the throne view. They’re under the blessed brooding spell of the quieting green rainbow which the throne-light makes as it shines out.

Over all our world there’s a throne; there is control; there is mastery. There is an eye that never slumbers, but instead watches sleeplessly with love’s sleeplessness. There is a sensitive hand laid on the pulse of the old earth’s life. There’s a masterful hand on the helm.

He . . . the one you are thinking of ... he sees all this. He doesn’t know all. Ah! he’s just beginning his lessons in knowing. But he does know enough to steady him, while the rest is working out.

Suppose we let him, the one you are thinking of, help us here a little. That is, let us try to see things a bit as he sees them up there. Let us try to get something of the throne view.

We'll draw our Bibles over and recall some of the things the Book tells. And he, his presence yonder . . . what we know that he does know, this will help us. It will make it all more real and personal.

What we're needing most is the throne view. We need to see things as our Lord Jesus sees them. That will help us greatly as our feet press the common clay, our common round of life.

The present time is not all the time there is. There is more coming after this. And the more will be a different sort from this. And it will change the whole look of things. And— may be—it'll come soon, this other different sort, sooner than any of us now think.

This horrible riot of blood and din, of smoke and confusion, of suffering and wrong and inhumanity, this breaking of all honour and right and pledged word, this is not God's plan.

This tangle of tragedies and horrid discord of noises, this stifling nightmare, this is all dead set against God's plan. It runs straight across the grain of God's plan. It hurts His heart more than it does ours.

It is a result of man's freedom; only this; all of this. This is the one only explanation. This is the image of God in which we were made ... this freedom of choice and action. And this hell-thing called war, now in its superlative degree, this is a result, one result, of man's freedom. That is one thing to see clearly.

The present is not the whole. It's only a part. It's only a hyphen, a thing in between. There's something coming after the hyphen, this bloody tangled tangling hyphen.

There is a change coming. It will be a radical change. It will be a blessed change. It will be a change back to original Eden conditions.

Some day our Lord Jesus is coming back. The blue that opened to let Him through and up, will open again to let Him through and down.

He will come in great glory just as He naturally is. His glory was hidden before, for the sake of our eyes. No one knows when He will come. But, mark you keenly, when He does come . . . !

That fire is doing better now, isn't it? That stirring up of the fagot did good. We are getting a bit warmer now. The chill is less marked. Give that big log there a turn . . . so . . . that's good! Now we'll go on.

When He does come, it will not be to wind things up, to close things up. It will be to begin things anew on the old earth, on the original plan.

Yes, there will be some radical changes at the beginning of the new order of things. But chiefly it will be a fresh start on the original plan of life on this same old earth, as first planned by God.

There will be no war then. There will be a gradual cessation of sickness and death until these are largely, almost wholly unknown. Envy, hatred, jealousy, bickering, fighting, rivalries of the bad sort and of the not-good sort . . . these will be gone.

Pain, hunger, poverty, weakness, distressing partings, ignorance, passion, prejudice, superstition, gradually these will go until they will be almost forgotten. It will be a reign of love, on this same old earth, with the present laws of living, learning, growing, serving, all in full sway, but in a natural way.

The common word for it all is Kingdom, the thing we all pray daily to come. The atmosphere of it will be an atmosphere of love—strong, pure, true love.

The purpose of it will be to let men really get acquainted with God, and God's way of things. They will be finding how life will be when God is let in as freely as is natural, both to life and to Him.

There'll be need of helpers in that day, great need of trained, tested, trusty helpers. This present time is part of our schooltime. And so is the present interval with those who have been taken up and away.

Our loved ones who have been taken from our clinging grasp are in school. They are in training. They are being got ready for the service of the Kingdom time that's coming down on the old earth.

Chapter 5: Maybe Nearer Than We Think

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“Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not rest until he have finished the thing.”— Rth_3:18.

“He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waters thereof are still.”—Psalms 107:29.

“He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”—Matthew 8:26.

“Calm me, my God, and keep me calm,

Soft resting on Thy breast;

Soothe me with holy hymn and psalm,

And bid my spirit rest.”

Horatius Bonar

That day may be much nearer than we think. He, our Lord Jesus, may be much closer in His return than any of us suspect.

“Some glorious morn—but when? Ah who shall say?

The steepest mountain will become a plain,

And the parched land be satisfied with rain.

The gates of brass all broken ; iron bars, Transfigured, form a ladder to the stars.

Rough places plain, and crooked ways all straight,

For him who with a patient heart can wait.

These things shall be on God’s appointed day:

It may not be to-morrow—yet it may.”

It is quite possible — yes, a stronger word can be used there —it is probable that our generation will see this great change in the order of things. Some of us may actually see Him coming down out of the blue.

The very darkness of the night speaks of the coming of the new day.

“It darkens to the dawning

More than in all the night;

Earth’s shadows cast an awning

Just round the gates of light.

“O’er the horizon nearest

Lie balanced light and shade,

And where the light is clearest The dark is darkest made.” (F. W. Robertson, of Brighton)

And now there’s another warming, helping bit here. We’ll put another log on the fire. When He does come, these loved ones of ours who are with Him now, they will come with Him.

Some day we will suddenly notice that the sun’s light at its noon- brightness has become a shadow. Startled, we shall look up to see a brighter shining above the sun.

There will be a break in the blue over our heads, and out of it will come the Lord Jesus Himself.

The brightness of His Person will outshine all else.

Then some very swift and very wondrous, though simple, transformations will take place. It’ll all be quicker than the words can be told.

These dear bodies of our loved ones that have been laid away will know the touch of a new life coming into them, as their former dwellers shall re-enter them and rise up into the presence of the Lord Jesus in the air.

“How can we know that the flowers will bloom,

When blue, and scarlet, and gold,

Lighting no more the forest’s gloom,

Lie slain by the frost and cold?

“How can we tell that the birds again

Will warble from leafy spray?

Garden, and copse, and wood, and fen,

Saw them all fly away.

“And yet, serenely, for bird and flower

We wait spring’s fragrant breath,

Faint hearts, shall we not trust His power

To lift the veil of death?”

How can we know this other spring is coming? Very simply. We have His Word pledged to us. And, under that, we have the yet more sacred pledge of His blood shed for us.

And beyond that we have the yet more joyous pledge of His new life rising up out of death and being lived for us. A three-fold cord that can’t be broken.

So the spring is coming, this new blessed Kingdom springtime, with its wondrous new life for those we've loved long since, and lost . . . but only for a little while.

Then we who are living, who have courteously waited, and given these loved ones precedence, then we too shall know a Divine change in our bodies, making them answer to a new law of gravitation upward.

And we shall all at once find ourselves up with Him and with them. And then with them and with Him we shall share in the blessed earthly ministry of the Kingdom time.

“Out of the chill and the shadow Into the thrill and the shine;

Out of the dearth and the famine

Into the fullness Divine.

Up from the strife and the battle

(Oft with the shameful defeat),

Up to the palm and the laurel,

Oh, but the rest will be sweet!

“Leaving the cloud and the tempest,

Reaching the balm and the cheer,

Finding the end of our sorrow,

Finding the end of our fear.

Seeing the face of the Master.

Yearned for in ‘distance and dream,’

Oh, for that rapture of gladness !

Oh, for that vision supreme!

“Meeting the dear ones departed,

Knowing them, clasping their hands,

All the beloved and true-hearted

There in the fairest of lands!

Sin evermore left behind us,

Pain nevermore to distress;

Changing the moan for the music,

Living the Saviour to bless.

“There we shall learn the sweet meanings

Hidden today from our eyes;

There we shall waken like children

Joyous at gift and surprise.

Come then, dear Lord, in the gloaming,

Or where the dawning is gray!

Take us to dwell in the presence—

Only Thyself lead the way.

“Out of the chill and the shadow,

Into the thrill and the shine!

Out of the dearth and the famine,

Into the fullness Divine.

Out of the sigh and the silence,

Into the deep-swelling song!

Out of the exile and bondage,

Into the home-gathered throng.” (Margaret E. Sangster.)

This is the throne view, the upper view, the fuller view. It fits this present sore time into its niche in the whole sweep of our Lord’s plan. And this wholly changes the outlook.

This is the view our loved ones have up in the Master’s presence. And we may have it and keep it, too, if we will. And so, many questions will be answered and much of the heartache eased.

“In the midst of you standeth One whom ye recognize not.”—John 1:26.

“Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples discerned not that it was Jesus.”—John 21:4.

“And lo, I am with you all the days.”—Matthew 28:20.

“A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot;

Rose plot,

Fringed pool,

Fern’d grot—

The veriest school

Of peace; and yet the fool

Contends that God is not—

Not God! In gardens! When the eve is cool!

Nay, but I have a sign ;

'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

Chapter 6: The Pilot's Face

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But—meanwhile—there's a meanwhile. There's a waiting time, before the storm clears. And we must needs live through this waiting time. The road up to the hilltop where the air is bracing and sunshiny, that road leads through a valley.

It goes down before turning up. It may even go further down before the turn-up is reached. And the valley is apt to be damp and chill. Raw winds blow there. The sun doesn't get through for days at a time, sometimes. And the fog of the valley wraps you about with a close clinging clammy fold.

And we are in this valley. The hill-top's there, that we have been looking at, from which one can see all. The valley is only a part, the sun-lit hill is the greater part.

But we are so apt to get the valley mood, and let our eyes drop instead of keeping them lifted up to the hills. Well there is a bit of valley-truth for us valley-travellers to warm by.

Let us put another log on the fire, a good-sized log this time, one that is well-seasoned and will kindle quickly, and burn brightly and send out a good glow of heat. And let us clear the ashes a bit so that the fresh air can get to fire and log.

Here is the simple but wondrous bit of meanwhile truth, the valley truth, to cheer the lower road: there is Somebody by your side. When you're alone; you're not alone He's there.

The angels of the Lord are round about. Yes; but this One, the Lord Himself is inside that angel-circle, nearer than they.

But our eyesight is a bit blurred.

Maybe it is like Mary's in the garden. (John 20:1-18). Her tear-misted eyes thought she saw a gardener, but it was Jesus. And He had come there just for her. He spoke her name. Then she knew. And all changed.

Suppose you get still a bit . . . quiet . . . and listen. You'll hear your name in the same voice. And there'll come the same change as with Mary. One sound of His quiet voice will change everything for you. Reach out your hand sometime as you sit alone. He's there by your side now.

We are bothered, sometimes, like the seven men in the boat that grey dawn on Galilee's blue waters (John 21:1-14). A long night it had been, and they were tired in body and more tired in heart.

There seemed no outlook, nor uplook. Only a discouraging inlook and the despairing downlook. But they were wrong. That "seemed" wasn't right. Jesus was there, close up.

He was talking with them, concerned about them, making a fire to warm their cold, and broiling fish to feed their hunger. What a Saviour to think of such things, just as a thoughtful mother would do!

And His presence being recognized made outlook and uplook and glad-look.

Are you and I like them? ... eyes down . . . heart down? But He is here. Listen to Him. Sit still with Him a bit. Sing to Him a snatch or two of praise for what He is, and what He is going to do.

“I have not seen His face—

Not yet, not yet!

But oft beside my own

His feet are set,

And I'll no strangeness feel,

No chill surprise,

That glad day when He bids

Me lift mine eyes.

“If I have felt His touch

I am not sure,

But when earth-sorrows grow

Past all earth's cure,

Comes there such sense of Him

So close, so dear,

That mine own blood and breath

Seem not more near.

“I have not heard His voice,

That, too, I wait;

And not so much I pray

The opening gate,

And all that shows or sings

Dark Jordan past,

As but to hear Him speak

At home at last.” (William Hervey Woods.)

And as we sit in stillness, and say to ourselves, “He is here,” something else comes. We remember that He has been here before. This road I'm on—this is no new road to Him. And it was a rougher road then.

“Rougher? ” you say instinctively, without stopping to think, while your hand goes to your heart. Then as you think a bit you say softly: “Yes, it was rougher for Him.” The pain cut deeper . . . yes, this same sort of pain. He knows. He understands. He feels. He feels with you. He suffers with you. He has come to help. Let Him. Learn to spend the day with Him. That will brighten this “little while between.”

“Let the little while between

In the golden light be seen.”

Lean on Him. He’s here. Readers of Robert Louis Stevenson will remember that in one of his books he tells the story of a ship at sea in a severe storm. Things had got into desperate shape.

And now the storm is driving the ship toward the coast, which means certain wreckage of the ship, and possibly death for most of crew and passengers.

The passengers are all below, and sternly forbidden to attempt the deck. The hatches are all fastened securely down. And there, huddled together, with only the dreadful noises of the storm and the distressing pitch and toss of the boat, and the close foul air that can hardly be breathed, the passengers are in great bodily discomfort and mental distress. They are surely going down.

Above, everything is tied up that can be tied, the decks are washed by the furious waves, and forward the pilot is lashed securely with ropes at the wheel, that he may not be washed away while he tries to guide the wheel and turn the ship out into safe waters. It is a most distressing scene.

Then a venturesome passenger manages to elude officers and crew, finds a way up on deck, and with great difficulty he creeps along the smooth slippery deck, holding as best he can here and there, until finally he manages to get within sight of the pilot.

Yes, the pilot is still there. That’s something. And as he gripped hard to the rail he thought he could half see through blinding dash of wave and spray that, slowly, little by little, the wheel was turning the ship out from the coast toward the deep water.

Just then the pilot seemed to feel the presence of someone, and glancing over saw the man so intently watching him. And a smile lit up his tired, set face for a moment.

Quickly as he could, the man crept back the length of the slippery deck, and down below; and as he reached the crowd of huddling passengers in the dark and damp of their close quarters cried out, “I have seen the face of the pilot; and he smiled.”

The story tells its own tale to us just now. It is a tremendous storm that is raging now. The ship seems headed straight for a rocky coast. The wreckage will be terrific beyond any experience yet, if the ship actually strikes the rocks.

And we’re huddled in most of us, where the outlook is so limited. Sometimes it seems as if there were no outlook. And the storm blinds our eyes. And our personal distress seems quite beyond words.

But listen, there’s a Pilot. His hand is on the wheel, steady and firm. And if we may, in the venture of a child’s simple faith, creep out and look, we can see His face.

For it is always turned toward us. And He is smiling quietly down into our bewildered eyes. And we can say, in the words of the venturesome passenger, "I have seen the face of the Pilot . . . and . . . He smiled." And that will settle everything for us.

For He knows all. And He sees the sunshine after rain, and calm after storm. He has our loved ones up in the sunlight of the homeland with the Father.

And He Himself walks close by, saying in a quiet voice with a thrill of soft music in it, "Be of good cheer, I am here."

"After the wind . . . after the earthquake . . . after the fire, a still small voice (which was a sound of gentle stillness)."—1 Kings 19:11-12 with margin.

"Drop Thy still dews of quietness,

Till all our strivings cease:

Take from our souls the strain and stress;

And let our ordered lives confess

The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the pulses of desire

Thy coolness and Thy balm;

Let sense be done, let flesh retire,

Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire

O, still small voice of calm."

John Greenleaf Whittier.

"Then are they glad because they are quiet; So, He bringeth them unto their desired haven."—Psalms 107:30.

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