

WORDS OF CHEER FOR DAILY LIFE

by C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon's devotional encouragement emphasizing spiritual privileges and the believer's inheritance in Christ, designed to uplift and strengthen Christians in their daily walk.

22 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. BOOK: Words of Cheer for Daily Life
2. Chapter 1: "Sons of Jacob"
3. Chapter 2: Faith versus Fear
4. Chapter 3: Liberty From the Fear of Death
5. Chapter 4: Suffering and Consolation
6. Chapter 5: The Saints are Kings!
7. Chapter 6: The Holy Spirit a Comforter
8. Chapter 7: The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax
9. Chapter 8: Against the World
10. Chapter 9: The Divine Refuge
11. Chapter 10: The Use of Chastisement
12. Chapter 11: Ministers and Success
13. Chapter 12: Season of Darkness
14. Chapter 13: Lacking Joy and Peace
15. Chapter 14: Mr. Read-To Halt and His Companions
16. Chapter 15: Joy In Life's Hard Times
17. Chapter 16: Cure For Heart Ache
18. Chapter 17: A Word to the Troubled
19. Chapter 18: Things Working Together for Good
20. Chapter 19: Consolation
21. Chapter 20: Difficulties In Front: Enemies Behind
22. Chapter 21: A Harp's Sweet Notes

BOOK: Words of Cheer for Daily Life

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C. H. Spurgeon

Chapter 1: "Sons of Jacob"

"Sons of Jacob" By "the sons of Jacob" are meant persons who enjoy peculiar rights and titles. Jacob had no rights by birth; but he soon acquired them. He changed a mess of pottage with his brother Esau, and thus gained the birthright. I do not justify the means; but he did also obtain the blessing, and so acquired peculiar rights. By the "sons of Jacob" are meant persons who have peculiar rights and titles. Unto them that believe, He hath given the right and power to become sons of God. They have an interest in the blood of Christ; they have a right to "enter in through the gates into the city"; they have a title to eternal honours; they have a promise to everlasting glory; they have a right to call themselves sons of God. Oh! there are peculiar rights and privileges belonging to the "sons of Jacob." But these "sons of Jacob" were men of peculiar manifestations. Jacob had had peculiar manifestations from his God, and thus he was highly honoured. Once, at night-time, he lay down and slept; he had the hedges for his curtains, the sky for his canopy, a stone for his pillow, and the earth for his bed. Oh! then he had a peculiar manifestation. There was a ladder, and he saw the angels of God ascending and descending. He thus had a manifestation of Christ Jesus, as the ladder which reaches from earth to heaven, up and down which angels came to bring us mercies. Then what a manifestation there was at Mahanaim, when the angels of God met him; and again at Peniel, when he wrestled with God, and saw Him face to face. Those were peculiar manifestations; and this passage refers to those who, like Jacob, have had peculiar manifestations. The sons of Jacob have had peculiar manifestations. They have talked with God as a man talketh with his friend; they have whispered in the ear of Jehovah; Christ hath been with them to sup with them, and they with Christ; and the Holy Spirit hath shone into their souls with such a mighty radiance, that they could not doubt about special manifestations. The "sons of Jacob" are the men who enjoy these manifestations.

Then, they are men of peculiar trials. Ah! poor Jacob! I should not choose Jacob's lot if I had not the prospect of Jacob's blessing; for a hard lot his was. He had to run away from his father's house to Laban's; and then that surly old Laban cheated him all the years he was there—cheated him of his wife, cheated him in his wages, cheated him in his flocks, and cheated him all through the story. By-and-bye he had to run away from Laban, who pursued him and overtook him. Next came Esau with four hundred men to cut him up root and branch. Then there was a season of prayer, and afterwards he wrestled, and had to go all his life with his thigh out of joint. But a little further on, Rachel, his dear beloved, died. Then his daughter Dinah is led astray, and the sons murder the Shechemites. Anon there is dear Joseph sold into Egypt, and a famine comes. Then Reuben goes up to his couch and pollutes it; Judah commits incest with his own daughter-in-law; and all his sons become a plague to him. At last Benjamin is taken away; and the old man, almost broken-hearted, cries, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." Never was man more tried than Jacob, all through the one sin of cheating his brother. All through his life God chastised him. But I believe there are many who can sympathize with dear old Jacob. They have had to pass through trials very much like his. Well, cross-bearers! God says, "I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Poor tried souls! ye are not consumed because of

the unchanging nature of your God. Now do not get fretting, and say, with the self-conceit of misery, "I am the man who hath seen affliction." Why, "the Man of Sorrows" was afflicted more than you; Jesus was indeed a mourner. You only see the skirts of the garments of affliction. You never have trials like His. You do not understand what troubles mean; you have hardly sipped the cup of trouble; you have only had a drop or two, but Jesus drank the dregs. "Fear not," saith God, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob," men of peculiar trials, "are not consumed."

Then, "sons of Jacob" are men of peculiar character; for though there were some things about Jacob's character which we cannot commend, there are one or two things which God commends. There was Jacob's faith, by which Jacob had his name written amongst the mighty worthies who obtained not the promises on earth, but shall obtain them in heaven. Are you men of faith, beloved? Do you know what it is to walk by faith, to live by faith, to get your temporary food by faith, to live on spiritual manna—all by faith? Is faith the rule of your life? if so, you are the "sons of Jacob."

Then Jacob was a man of prayer—a man who wrestled, and groaned, and prayed. "Ah! you poor heathen, don't you pray?" "No!" you say, "I never thought of such a thing; for years I have not prayed." Well, I hope you may before you die. Live and die without prayer, and you will pray long enough when you get to hell. There is a woman: she was so busy sending her children to the Sunday-school, she had no time to pray. No time to pray? Had you time to dress? There is a time for every purpose under heaven, and if you had purposed to pray, you would have prayed. Sons of God cannot live without prayer. They are wrestling Jacobs. They are men in whom the Holy Ghost so works, that they can no more live without prayer than I can live without breathing. They must pray. Mark you, if you are living without prayer, you are living without Christ; and dying like that, your portion will be in the lake which burneth with fire. God redeem you, God rescue you from such a lot! But you who are "the sons of Jacob" take comfort, for God is immutable.

Chapter 2: Faith versus Fear

Faith versus Fear The believer when he is brought into peace with God does not tremble at the thought of God's power. He does not ask, "Will He plead against me with His great power?" But he says, "No, that very power, once my terror, and fear, is now my refuge and my hope, for He shall put that very power in me. I rejoice that God is Almighty, for He will lend me His omnipotence—'He will put strength into me.'" The very power which would have damned my soul, saves my soul. The very power that would have crushed me, God puts into me, that the work of salvation may be accomplished. No, He will not use it to crush me, but He will put that very strength into me. Dost see there the Mighty One upon His throne? Dread Sovereign, I see Thine awful arm. What, wilt Thou crush the sinner? Wilt Thou utterly destroy him with Thy strength? "No," saith He, "come hither, child." And if you go to His almighty throne, "There," saith He, "that self-same arm which made thee quake, see there, I give it to thee. Go out and live. I have made thee mighty as I am, to do My works; I will put strength into thee. The same strength which would have broken thee to pieces on the wheel shall now be put into thee, that thou mayest do mighty works."

Now, this great strength sometimes goes out in prayer. Did you ever hear a man pray in whom God had put strength? You have heard some of us poor puny souls pray, I dare say; but have you ever heard a man pray that God had made into a giant? Oh, if you have, you will say it is a mighty thing to hear such a man in supplication. I have seen him as if he had seized the angel, and would pull him down. I have seen him now and then slip in his wrestling; but, like a giant, he has recovered his footing, and seemed, like Jacob, to hurl the angel to the ground. I have marked the man lay hold upon the throne of mercy, and declare, "Lord, I will never let go, except thou bless me." I have seen him, when heaven's gates have been apparently barred, go up to them, and say, "Ye gates, open wide in Jesus' name;" "and I have seen the gates fly open before him, as if the man were God himself; for he is armed with God Almighty's strength. I have seen that man, in prayer, discover some great mountain in his way; and he prayed it down, until it became a very molehill. He has beaten the hills and made them like chaff by the immensity of his might.

Some of you think I am talking enthusiasm; but such cases have been, and are now. Oh, to have heard Luther pray! Luther, you know, when Melancthon was dying, went to his death-bed, and said, "Melancthon, you shall not die!" "Oh," said Melancthon, "I must die! It is a world of toil and trouble." "Melancthon," said he, "I have need of thee, and God's cause has need of thee, and as my name is Luther, thou shalt not die!" The physician said he would. Well, down went Luther on his knees, and began to tug at death. Old Death struggled mightily for Melancthon, and he had got him well-nigh on his shoulders. "Drop him," said Luther, "drop him, I want him." "No," said Death, "he is my prey, I will take him!"

"Down with him," said Luther, "down with him, Death, or I will wrestle with thee!" And he seemed to take hold of the grim monster, and hurl him to the ground; and he came off victorious, like an Orpheus, with his wife, up from the very shades of death; he had delivered Melancthon from death by prayer! "Oh," say you, "that is an extraordinary case." No, not one-half so extraordinary as you

dream. Men and women have done the same in other cases; have asked a thing of God, and have had it; that have been to the throne, and showed a promise, and said they would not come away without its fulfilment, and have come back from God's throne conquerors of the Almighty; for prayer moves the arm that moves the world.

"Prayer is the sinew of God," said one, "it moves His arm;" and so it is. Verily, in prayer, with the strength of the faithful heart, there is a beautiful fulfilment of the text, "He will put strength in me." Not only in prayer, but in duty, the man who has great faith in God, and whom God has girded with strength, how gigantic does he become! Have you never read of those great heroes who put to flight whole armies, and scattered kings like the snow on Salmon? Have you never read of those men that were fearless of foes, and stalked onward before all their opposers, as if they would as soon die as live? I read of a case in the old kirk of Scotland, before that King James who wished to force "the black prelacy" upon them. Andrew Melville and some of his associates were deputed to wait upon the king, and as they were going with a scroll ready written, they were warned to take care and return, for their lives were at stake. They paused a moment, and Andrew said, "I am not afraid, thank God, nor feeble-spirited in the cause and message of Christ; come what pleases God to send, our commission shall be executed." At these words the deputation took courage, and went forward. On reaching the palace, and having obtained an audience, they found his majesty attended by Lennox and Arran, and several other lords, all of whom were English. They presented their remonstrance. Arran lifted it from the table, and glancing over it, he then turned to the ministers, and furiously demanded, "Who dares sign these treasonable articles?" "We dare," said Andrew Melville, "and will render our lives in the cause." Having thus spoken, he came forward to the table, took the pen, subscribed his name, and was followed by his brethren. Arran and Lennox were confounded; the king looked on in silence, and the nobles in surprise. Thus did our good forefathers appear before kings, and yet were not ashamed. "The proud had them greatly in derision, yet they declined not from the law of God." Having thus discharged their duty, after a brief conference, the ministers were permitted to depart in peace. The king trembled more at them than if a whole army had been at his gates; and why was this? It was because God had put His own strength into them to make them masters of their duty. And you have some such in your midst now. Despised they may be; but God has made them like the lion-like men of David, who would go down into the pit in the depth of winter, and take the lion by the throat and slay him. We have some in our churches—but a remnant, I admit—who are not afraid to serve their God, like Abdiel, "faithful amongst the faithless found." We have some who are superior to the customs of the age, and scorn to bow at mammon's knee, who will not use the trimming language of too many modern ministers, but stand out for God's gospel, and the pure white banner of Christ, unstained and unsullied by the doctrines of men. Then are they mighty! Why they are mighty is because God has put strength in them.

"And shall I hold on to the end?" says the believer. Yes, thou wilt, for God's strength is in thee. "Shall I be able to bear such-and-such a trial?" Yes, thou wilt. Cannot Omnipotence stem the torrent? And Omnipotence is in thee; for, like Ignatius of old, thou art a God-bearer; thou bearest God about with thee. Thy heart is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and thou shalt yet overcome. "But can I ever stand firm in such-and-such an evil day?" Oh, yes you will, for He will put His strength in you!

I was in company, some time ago, with some ministers; one of them observed, "Brother, if there were to be stakes in Smithfield again, I am afraid they would find very few to burn among us." "Well," I said, "I do not know anything about how you would burn; but this I know right well, that there never will be any lack of men who are ready to die for Christ." "Oh!" said he, "but they are not the right sort of men." "Well," said I, "but do you think they are the Lord's children?" "Yes, I believe they are, but they are not the right sort." "Ah!" said I, "but you would find them the right sort, if they came to the test, every one of them; they have not got burning grace yet. What would be the use of it." We do not want the grace till the stakes come; but we should have burning grace in burning moments. If now a hundred of us were called to die for Christ, I believe there would not only be found a hundred, but five hundred, that would march to death, and sing all the way. Whenever I find faith, I believe that God will put strength into the man; and I never think anything to be impossible to a man with faith in God, while it is written, "He will put strength in me."

Cæsar could not swim the Tiber, accoutred as he was; and dost thou hope to swim the Jordan with thy flesh about thee? No, thou wilt sink then, unless Jesus, as Æneas did Anchises, from the flames of Rome, upon his shoulders, lift thee from Jordan, and carry thee across the stream, thou wilt never be able to walk across the river; thou wilt ne'er be able to face that tyrant and smile in his face, unless thou hast something more than mortal. Thou wilt need then to be belted about with the girdle of divinity, or else thy loins will be loosed, and thy strength will fail thee, when thou needst it most. Many a man has ventured to the Jordan in his own strength; but oh! how he has shrieked and howled, when the first wave has touched his feet! But never weakling went to death with God within him, but he found himself mightier than the grave. Go on, Christian, for this is thy promise, "He will put strength in me."

"Weak, though I am, yet through His might, I all things can perform."

Go on; dread not God's power, but rejoice at this, He will put His strength in you; He will not use His power to crush you.

Chapter 3: Liberty From the Fear of Death

Liberty from the Fear of Death The true-born child of God serves his Master more than ever he did. As old Erskine says:—

"Slight now His loving presence if they can;

No, no; His conquering kindness leads the van. When everlasting love exerts the sway, They judge themselves most kindly bound to obey;

Bound by redeeming love in stricter sense, Than ever Adam was in innocence."

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" from the Fear of Death. O death! how many a sweet cup hast thou made bitter. O death! how many a revel hast thou broken up. O death! how many a gluttonous banquet hast thou spoiled! O death! how many a sinful pleasure hast thou turned into pain. Take ye the telescope and look through the vista of a few years, and what see you? Grim death in the distance grasping his scythe. He is coming, coming, coming; and what is behind him? Ay, that depends upon your own character. If ye are the sons of God, there is the palm-branch; if ye are not, ye know what followeth death—hell follows him. O death! thy spectre hath haunted many a house where sin otherwise would have rioted. O death! thy chill hand hath touched many a heart that was big with lust, and made it start affrighted from its crime. Oh, how many men are slaves to the fear of death!

Half the people in the world are afraid to die. There are some madmen who can march up to the cannon's mouth; there are some fools who rush with bloody hands before their Maker's tribunal; but most men fear to die. Who is the man that does not fear to die? I will tell you. The man that is a believer. Fear to die! Thank God, I do not. The cholera may come again. I pray God it may not; but if it does, it matters not to me: I will toil and visit the sick by night and by day, until I drop; and if it takes me, sudden death is sudden glory. And so with the weakest saint; the prospect of dissolution does not make you tremble. Sometimes you fear, but oftener you rejoice. You sit down and calmly think of dying. What is death? It is a low porch through which you stoop to enter heaven. What is life? It is a narrow screen that separates us from glory, and death kindly removes it!

I recollect a saying of a good old woman, who said, "Afraid to die, sir? I have dipped my foot in Jordon every morning before breakfast for the last fifty years, and do you think I am afraid to die now?" Die? why, we die hundreds of times; we "die daily;" we die every morning; we die each night when we sleep; by faith we die; and so dying will be old work when we come to it. We shall say, "Ah, death! you and I have been old acquaintances; I have had thee in my bedroom every night; I have talked with thee each day; I have had the skull upon my dressing table; and I have oftentimes thought of thee. Death! thou art come at last, but thou art a welcome guest; thou art an angel of light, and the best friend I have had." Why, then, dread death; since there is no fear of God's leaving you when you come to die? Here I must tell you that anecdote of the good Welsh lady, who, when she lay a-dying, was visited by her minister. He said to her, "Sister, are you sinking?" She answered him not a word, but looked at him with an incredulous eye. He repeated

the question, "Sister, are you sinking?" She looked at him again, as if she could not believe that he would ask such a question. At last, rising a little in the bed, she said, "Sinking! Sinking! Did you ever know a sinner sink through a rock? If I had been standing on the sand, I might sink; but, thank God, I am on the Rock of Ages, and there is no sinking there." How glorious to die! Oh, angels, come! Oh, cohorts of the Lord of host, stretch, stretch your broad wings and lift us up from earth; O, winged seraphs, bear us far above the reach of these inferior things; but, till ye come, I'll sing,—

"Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing— But gladly put off* these garments of clay, To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing;

Since Jesus to glory, through death led the way."

But there are two sides to such questions as this. There are some glorious things that we are free to. Not only are we freed from sin in every sense from the law, and from the fear of death; but we are free to do something. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" and that liberty gives us certain rights and privileges.

We are free to heaven's charter. There is heaven's charter—the Magna Charta—the Bible; and you are free to it. There is a choice passage: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;" thou art free to that. Here is another: "Mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart;" you are free to that. Here is another: "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end;" you are free to that. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Here is a chapter touching election: you are free to that if you are elect. Here is another, speaking of the non-condemnation of the righteous, and their justification; you are free to that. You are free to all that is in the Bible. Here is a never-failing treasure, filled with boundless stores of grace. It is the bank of heaven: you may draw from it as much as you please without let or hindrance. Bring nothing with you, except faith. Bring as much faith as you can get, and you are welcome to all that is in the Bible. There is not a promise, not a word in it, that is not yours. In the depths of tribulation, let it comfort you. Mid waves of distress let it cheer you When sorrows surround thee, let it be thy helper. This is thy Father's love-token: let it never be shut up and covered with dust. Thou art free to it—use, then, thy freedom.

Next, recollect that thou art free to the throne of grace. It is the privilege of Englishmen, that they can always send a petition to Parliament; and it is the privilege of a believer, that he can always send a petition to the throne of God. I am free to God's throne. If I want to talk to God to-morrow morning, I can. If to-night I wish to have conversation with my Master, I can go to Him. I have a right to go to His throne. It matters not how much I have sinned. I go and ask for pardon. It signifies nothing how poor I am—I go and plead His promise that He will provide all things needful. I have a right to go to His throne at all times—in midnight's darkest hour, or in noontide's heat. Where'er I am; if fate commands me to the utmost verge of the wide earth, I have still constant admission to His throne. Use that right, beloved—use that right. There is not one of you that lives up to his privilege. Many a gentleman will live beyond his income, spending more than he has coming in; but there is not a Christian that does that—I mean that lives up to his spiritual income. Oh, no! you have an infinite income—an income of promises—an income of grace; and no Christian ever lived up to his income. Some people say, "If I had more money, I should have a larger house, and horses, and a carriage, and so on." Very well and good; but I wish Christians would do the same. I wish they would set up a larger house, and do greater things for God; look more happy, and take

those tears away from their eyes. With such stores in the bank, and so much in hand, that God gives you, you have no right to be poor. Up, rejoice! rejoice! The Christian ought to live up to his income, and not below it.

"Turn, then, my soul unto thy rest, The ransom of thy great High Priest Hath set the captive free.

Trust to His efficacious blood, Nor fear thy banishment from God, Since Jesus died for thee."

Chapter 4: Suffering and Consolation

Suffering and Consolation As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolations of Christ abound. Here is a blessed proportion. God always keeps a pair of scales—in this side he puts his people's trials and in that he puts their consolations. When the scale of trial is nearly empty, you will always find the scale of consolation in nearly the same condition; and when the scale of trials is full, you will find the scale of consolation just as heavy; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, even so shall consolation abound by Christ. This is a matter of pure experience. Oh, it is mysterious that, when the black clouds gather most, the light within us is always the brightest! When the night lowers and the tempest is coming on, the heavenly captain is always closest to his crew. It is a blessed thing, when we are most cast down, then it is that we are most lifted up by the consolations of Christ.

Trials make more room for consolation. There is nothing that makes a man have a big heart like a great trial. I always find that little, miserable people, whose hearts are about the size of a grain of mustard-seed, never have had much to try them. I have found that those people who have no sympathy for their fellows—who never weep for the sorrows of others—very seldom have had any woes of their own. Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for consolation. God comes into our heart—he finds it full—he begins to break our comforts and to make it empty; then there is more room for grace. The humbler a man lies, the more comfort he will always have.

I recollect walking with a ploughman, one day, a man who was deeply taught, although he was a ploughman—and really ploughmen would make a great deal better preachers than many college gentlemen—and he said to me, "Depend upon it, if you or I ever get one inch above the ground, we shall get just that inch too high." I believe it is true; for the lower we lie, the nearer to the ground we are—the more our troubles humble us—the more fit we are to receive comfort; and God always gives us comfort when we are most fit for it. That is one reason why consolations increase in the same ratio as our trials.

Then trouble exercises our graces, and the very exercise of our graces tends to make us more comfortable and happy. Where showers fall most, there the grass is greenest. I suppose the fogs and mists of Ireland make it "the Emerald Isle"; and wherever you find great fogs of trouble, and mists of sorrow, you always find emerald green hearts: full of the beautiful verdure of the comfort and love of God. O Christian, do not thou be saying, "Where are the swallows gone? they are gone: they are dead." They are not dead; they have skimmed the purple sea, and gone to a far-off land; but they will be back again by-and-by. Child of God, say not the flowers are dead; say not the winter has killed them, and they are gone. Ah! no; though winter hath coated them with the ermine of its snow; they will put up their heads again, and will be alive very soon. Say not, child of God, that the sun is quenched, because the cloud hath hidden it. Ah! no; he is behind there, brewing summer for thee; for when he cometh out again, he will have made the clouds fit to drop in April showers, all of them mothers of the sweet May flowers. And oh! above all, when thy God hides His

face, say not that He has forgotten thee. He is but tarrying a little while to make thee love Him better; and when He cometh, thou shalt have joy in the Lord, and shalt rejoice with joy unspeakable. Waiting exercises our grace; waiting tries our faith; therefore, wait on in hope: for though the promise tarry, it can never come too late.

Another reason why we are often most happy in our troubles is this—then we have the closest dealings with God. I, speak from heart knowledge and real experience. We never have such close dealings with God, as when we are in tribulation. When the barn is full, man can live without God; when the purse is bursting with gold, we somehow can do without so much prayer. But once take your gourds away, you want your God; once cleanse away the idols out of the house, then you must go and honour Jehovah.

Some of you do not pray half as much as you ought. If you are the children of God, you will have the whip; and when you have that whip, you will run to your Father. It is a fine day, and the child walks before its father; but there is a lion in the road, now he comes and takes his father's hand. He could run half-a-mile before him when all was fine and fair; but once bring the lion, and it is "father! father!" as close as he can be. It is even so with the Christian. Let all be well, and he forgets God. Jeshurun waxes fat, and he begins to kick against God; but take away his hopes, blast his joys, let the infant lie in the coffin, let the crops be blasted, let the herd be cut off from the stall, let the husband's broad shoulder lie in the grave, let the children be fatherless—then it is that God is a God indeed. Oh, strip me naked; take from me all I have; make me poor, a beggar, penniless, helpless; dash that cistern in pieces; crush that hope; quench the stars; put out the sun; shroud the moon in darkness, and place me all alone in space, without a friend, without a helper; still, "Out of the depths will I cry unto thee, O God." There is no cry so good as that which comes from the bottom of the mountains; no prayer half so hearty as that which comes up from the depths of the soul, through deep trials and afflictions. Hence they bring us to God, and we are happier; for that is the way to be happy—to live near God. So that while troubles abound, they drive us to God, and then consolations abound.

Some people call troubles weights. Verily they are so. A ship that has large sails and a fair wind, needs ballast. Troubles are the ballast of a believer. The eyes are the pumps which fetch out the bilge-water of his soul, and keep him from sinking. But if trials be weights, I will tell you of a happy secret. There is such a thing as making a weight lift you. If I have a weight chained to me, it keeps me down; but give me pulleys and certain appliances, and I can make it lift me up. Yes, there is such a thing as making troubles raise me towards heaven. A gentleman once asked a friend, concerning a beautiful horse of his, feeding about in the pasture with a clog on its foot, "Why do you clog such a noble animal?" "Sir," said he, "I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him: he is given to leap hedges." That is why God clogs His people. He would rather clog them than lose them; for if He did not clog them, they would leap the hedges and be gone. They want a tether to prevent their straying, and their God binds them with afflictions, to keep them near to Him, to preserve them, and have them in His presence. Blessed fact—as our troubles abound, our consolations also abound.

Chapter 5: The Saints are Kings!

The Saints Are Kings

Take the royal office of the saints. They are **KINGS**. They are not merely to be kings in heaven, but they are also kings on earth; for if my text does not say so, the Bible declares it in another passage: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood." We are kings even now. I want you to understand that before I explain the idea. Every saint of the living God, not merely has the prospect of being a king in heaven, but positively, in the sight of God, he is a king now; and he must say, with regard to his brethren and himself, "And hast made us," even now, "unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign upon the earth." A Christian is a king. He is not simply like a king, but he is a king, actually and truly. I shall show how he is like a king.

Remember his royal ancestry. What a fuss some people make about their grandfathers and grandmothers and distant ancestors? I remember seeing in Trinity College the pedigree of some great lord that went back just as far as Adam, and Adam was there digging the ground—the first man. It was traced all the way up. Of course I did not believe it. I have heard of some pedigrees that go back further. I leave that to your own common sense, to believe it or not. A pedigree in which shall be found dukes, marquises, and kings, and princes. Oh, what would some give for such a pedigree! I believe, however, that it is not what our ancestors were, but what we are, that will make us shine before God; that it is not so much in knowing that we have royal or priestly blood in our veins, as knowing that we are an honour to our race—that we are walking in the ways of the Lord, and reflecting credit upon the church, and upon the grace that makes us honourable. But since some men will glory in their descent, I will glory that the saints have the proudest ancestry in all the world. Talk of Caesars, or of Alexanders, or tell me even of our own good Queen: I say that I am of as high descent as her Majesty, or the proudest monarch in world. I am descended from the King of kings. The saint may well speak of his ancestry—he may exult in it, he may glory in it—for he is the son of God, positively and actually. His mother, the Church, is the Bride of Jesus; he is a twice-born child of heaven; one of the blood royal of the universe. The poorest woman or man on earth, loving Christ, is of a royal line. Give a man the grace of God in his heart, and his ancestry is noble. I can turn back the roll of my pedigree, and I can tell you that it is so ancient, that it has no beginning; it is more ancient than all the rolls of mighty men put together; for, from all eternity my Father existed: and, therefore, I have indeed a right royal and ancient ancestry. And then the saints, like monarchs, have a splendid retinue. Kings and monarchs cannot travel without a deal of state. In olden times, they had far more magnificence than they have now; but even in these days we see much of it when royalty is abroad. There must be a peculiar kind of horse, and a splendid chariot, and outriders; with all the etceteras of gorgeous pomp. Ay! and the kings of God, whom Jesus Christ has made kings and priests unto their God, have also a royal retinue. "Oh!" say you, "but I see some of them in rags; they are walking through the earth alone, sometimes without a helper or a friend." Ah! but there is a fault in your eyes. If you had eyes to see, you would perceive a bodyguard of angels always attending every one of the blood-bought family.

You remember Elijah's servant could not see anything around Elijah till his master opened his eyes; then he could see that there were horses and chariots round about Elijah. Lo! there are horses and chariots about me. And thou, saint of the Lord, where'er thou art, there are horses and chariots. In that bedchamber, where I was born, angels stood to announce my birth on high. In seas of trouble, when wave after wave seems to go over me, angels are there to lift up my head; when I come to die, when sorrowing friends shall, weeping, carry me to the grave, angels shall stand by my bier; and, when put into the grave, some mighty angel shall stand and guard my dust, and contend for its possession with the devil. Why should I fear? I have a company of angels about me; and whenever I walk abroad, the glorious cherubim. Kings and princes have certain things that are theirs by perspective right. For instance, her Majesty has her Buckingham Palace, and her other palaces, her crown royal, her sceptre, and so on. But has a saint a palace? Yes. I have a palace! and its walls are not made of marble, but of gold; its borders are carbuncles and precious gems; its windows are of agates; its stones are laid with fair colours; around it there is a profusion of every costly thing; rubies sparkle here and there; yea, pearls are but common stones within it. Some call it a mansion; but I have a right to call it a palace too, for I am a king. It is a mansion when I look at God, it is a palace when I look at men; because it is the habitation of a prince. Mark where this palace is. I am not a prince of Inde—I have no inheritance in any far-off land that men dream of—I have no El Dorado, or Home of Prester John; but yet I have a substantial palace. Yonder, on the hills of heaven it stands; I know not its position among the other mansions of heaven, but there it stands; and "I know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, I have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Have Christians a crown too? Oh, yes; but they do not wear it every day. They have a crown, but their coronation day is not yet arrived. They have been anointed monarchs, they have some of the authority and dignity of monarchs; but they are not crowned monarchs yet. But the crown is made. God will not have to order heaven's goldsmiths to fashion it in after-time; it is made already hanging up in glory. God hath "laid up for me a crown of righteousness." O saint, if thou didst just open some secret door in heaven, and go into the treasure chamber, thou wouldst see it filled with crowns. When Cortes entered the palace of Montezuma, he found a secret chamber bricked up, and he thought the wealth of all the world was there, so many different things were there stowed away. Could you enter God's secret treasure-house, what wealth would you see!" "Are there so many monarchs," you would say, "so many crowns, so many princes? Yes, and some bright angel would say, "Mark you that crown? It is yours;" and if you were to look within, you would read, "Made for a sinner saved by grace, whose name was—;" and then you would hardly believe your eyes, as you saw your own name engraved upon it. You are indeed a king before God; for you have a crown laid up in heaven. Whatever other insignia belong to monarchs, saints shall have. They shall have robes of whiteness; they shall have harps of glory; they shall have all things that become their regal state; so that we are indeed monarchs, you see; not mock-monarchs, clothed in purple garments of derision, and scoffed at with "Hail king of the Jews;" but we are real monarchs. "He hath made us kings and priests unto our God."

Kings are considered the most honourable amongst men. They are always looked up to and respected. If you should say, "a monarch is here!" a crowd would give way. I should not command much respect if I were to attempt to move about in a crowd; but if any one should shout, "here is the Queen!" every one would step aside and make room for her. A monarch generally commands respect. We think that worldly princes are the most honourable of the earth; but if you were to ask

God, he would reply, "my saints in whom I delight, these are the honourable ones." Tell me not of tinsel and gewgaw; tell me not of gold and silver; tell me not of diamonds and pearls; tell me not of ancestry and rank; preach to me not of pomp and power; but oh! tell me that a man is a saint of the Lord, for then he is an honourable man. God respects him, angels respect him, and the universe one day shall respect him, when Christ shall come to call him to his account, and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." You may despise a child of God now, sinner; you may laugh at him; you may say he is a hypocrite; you may call him a saint, a Methodist, a cant, and everything you like; but know that those titles will not mar his dignity—he is the honourable of the earth, and God estimates him as such. But some will say, "I wish you would prove what you affirm, when you say that saints are kings; for, if we were kings, we should never have any sorrows; kings are never poor as we are, and never suffer as we do." Who told you so? You say if you are kings, you would live at ease. Do not kings ever suffer? Was not David an anointed king? and was he not hunted like a partridge on the mountains? Did not the king himself pass over the brook Kedron, and all his people weeping as he went, when his son Absalom pursued him? And was he not a monarch when he slept on the cold ground, with no couch save the damp heather? Oh, yes, kings have their sorrows—crowned heads have their afflictions. Full oft

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

Do not expect that because you are a king, you are to have no sorrows. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink." And it is often so. The saints get but little wine here. It is not for kings to drink the wine of pleasure; it is not for kings to have much of the intoxicating drink and the surfeits of this world's delight. They shall have joy enough up yonder, when they shall drink it new in their Father's kingdom. Poor saint! do dwell on this. Thou art a king! I beseech thee, let it not go away from thy mind; but in the midst of thy tribulation, still rejoice in it. If thou hast to go through the dark tunnel of infamy, for Christ's name; if thou art ridiculed and reviled, still rejoice in the fact, "I am a king, and all the dominions of the earth shall be mine!"

Chapter 6: The Holy Spirit a Comforter

The Holy Spirit a Comforter

God the Holy Ghost is a very loving Comforter. I am in distress, and want consolation. Some passer-by hears of my sorrow, and he steps within, sits down and essays to cheer me; he speaks soothing words; but he loves me not, he is a stranger, he knows me not at all, he has only come in to try his skill; and what is the consequence? His words run o'er me like oil upon a slab of marble—they are like the pattering rain upon the rock; they do not break my grief; it stands unmoved as adamant, because he has no love for me. But let some one who loves me dearly as his own life come and plead with me, then truly his words are music; they taste like honey; he knows the password of the doors of my heart, and my ear is attentive to every word; I catch the intonation of each syllable as it falls, for it is like the harmony of the harps of heaven. Oh, there is a voice in love, it speaks a language which is its own, it is an idiom and an accent which none can mimic; wisdom cannot imitate it; oratory cannot attain unto it; it is love alone which can reach the mourning heart; love is the only handkerchief which can wipe the mourner's tears away. And is not the Holy Ghost a loving Comforter? Dost thou know, O saint, how much the Holy Spirit loves thee? Canst thou measure the love of the Spirit? Dost thou know how great is the affection of His soul towards thee? Go, measure heaven with thy span; go, weigh the mountains in the scales; go, take the ocean's water, and tell each drop; go, count the sand upon the sea's wide shore; and when thou hast accomplished this, thou canst tell how much He loveth thee. He has loved thee long; He has loved thee well; He loved thee ever; and He still shall love thee. Surely He is the person to comfort thee, because He loves. Admit Him, then, to your heart, O Christian that He may comfort you in your distress.

He is a faithful Comforter. Love sometimes proveth unfaithful. "Oh, sharper than a serpent's tooth" is an unfaithful friend! Oh, far more bitter than the gall of bitterness, to have a friend to turn from me in my distress! Oh, woe of woes, to have one who loves me in my prosperity forsake me in the dark day of my trouble! Sad indeed: but such is not God's Spirit He ever loves, and loves even to the end—a faithful Comforter. Child of God, you are in trouble. A little while ago you found Him a sweet and loving Comforter; you obtained relief from Him when others were but broken cisterns; He sheltered you in His bosom, and carried you in His arms. Oh, wherefore dost thou distrust Him now? Away with thy fears; for He is a faithful Comforter. "Ah! but," thou sayest, "I fear I shall be sick, and shalt be deprived of His ordinances." Nevertheless, He shall visit thee on thy sick bed, and sit by thy side to give thee consolation. "Ah! but I have distresses greater than you can conceive of; wave upon wave rolleth over me; deep calleth unto deep at the noise of the Eternal's waterspouts." Nevertheless, He will be faithful to His promise. "Ah! but I have sinned." So thou hast, but sin cannot sever thee from His love; He loves thee still. Think not, O poor downcast child of God, because the scars of thine old sins have marred thy beauty, that He loves thee less because of that blemish. Oh, no! He loved thee when He foreknew thy sin; He loved thee with the knowledge of what the aggregate of thy wickedness would be; and He does not love thee less now. Come to Him in all boldness of faith; tell Him thou hast grieved Him, and He will forget thy

wandering, and will receive thee again; the kisses of His love shall be bestowed upon thee, and the arms of His grace shall embrace thee. He is faithful: trust Him; He will never deceive you; trust Him, He will never leave you.

He is an unwearied Comforter. I have sometimes tried to comfort persons that have been tried. You now and then meet with the case of a nervous person. You ask, "What is your trouble?" You are told, and you essay, if possible, to remove it, but while you are preparing your artillery to batter the trouble, you find that it has shifted its quarters, and is occupying quite a different position. You change your argument and begin again; but lo, it is again gone, and you are bewildered. You feel like Hercules cutting off the ever-growing heads of the Hydra, and you give up your task in despair. You meet with persons whom it is impossible to comfort, reminding one of the man who locked himself up in fetters and threw the key away, so that nobody could unlock him. I have found some in the fetters of despair. "O, I am the man," say they, "that has seen affliction; pity me, pity me, O my friends; "and the more you try to comfort such people, the worse they get; and therefore, out of all heart, we leave them to wander alone among the tombs of their former joys. But the Holy Ghost is never out of heart with those whom He wishes to comfort. He attempts to comfort us, and we run away from the sweet cordial; He gives some sweet draught to cure us, and we will not drink it; He gives some wondrous portion to charm away all our troubles, and we put it away from us. Still He pursues us; and though we say that we will not be comforted, He says we shall be, and when He has said, He does it; He is not to be wearied by all our sins, not by all our murmurings. And oh, how wise a Comforter is the Holy Ghost! Job had comforters, and I think he spoke the truth when he said, "Miserable comforters are ye all." But I dare say they esteemed themselves wise; and when the young man Elihu rose to speak, they thought he had a world of impudence. Were they not "grave and reverend seniors?" Did not they comprehend his grief and sorrow? If they could not comfort him, who could? But they did not find out the cause. They thought he was not really a child of God, that he was self-righteous: and they gave him the wrong physic. It is a bad case when the doctor mistakes the disease and gives a wrong prescription, and so, perhaps, kills the patient. Sometimes, when we go and visit people we mistake their disease, we want to comfort them on this point, whereas they do not require any such comfort at all, and they would be better left alone than spoiled by such unwise comforters as we are. But oh, how wise the Holy Spirit is! He takes the soul, lays it on the table, and dissects it in a moment; He finds out the root of the matter, He sees where the complaint is, and then He applies the knife where something is required to be taken away, or puts a plaster where the sore is; and He never mistakes. Oh, how wise, the blessed Holy Ghost! From every comforter I turn and leave them all, for thou art He who alone givest the wisest consolation.

Then mark how safe a Comforter the Holy Ghost is. All comfort is not safe; mark that. There is a young man over there very melancholy. You know how he became so. He stepped into the house of God and heard a powerful preacher, and the Word was blessed, and convinced him of sin. When he went home, his father and the rest found there was something different about him, "Oh," they said, "John is mad; he is crazy;" and what said his mother? "Send him into the country for a week; let him go to the ball or to the theatre." John, did you find any comfort there? "Ah no; they made me worse, for while I was there, I thought hell might open and swallow me up." Did you find any relief in the gaities of the world? "No," say you, "I thought it was idle waste of time." Alas! this is miserable comfort, but it is the comfort of the worldling; and when a Christian gets into distress,

how many will recommend him this remedy and the other! "Go and hear Mr. So-and-so preach; have a few friends at your house; read such-and-such a consoling volume;" and very likely it is the most unsafe advice in the world. The devil will sometimes come to men's souls as a false comforter, and he will say to the soul, "What need is there to make all this ado about repentance? You are no worse than other people;" and he will try to make the soul believe that what is presumption is the real assurance of the Holy Ghost; thus he deceives many by false comfort. Ah! there have been many, like infants, destroyed by elixirs given to lull them to sleep; many have been ruined by the cry of "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, hearing gentle things when they ought to be stirred to the quick. Cleopatra's asp was brought in a basket of flowers; and men's ruin often lurks in fair and sweet speeches. But the Holy Ghost's comfort is safe, and you may rest on it. Let Him speak the word, and there is a reality about it; let Him give the cup of consolation, and you may drink it to the bottom, for in its depths there are no dregs, nothing to intoxicate or ruin, it is all safe.

Moreover, the Holy Ghost is an active Comforter: He does not comfort by words, but by deeds. Some comfort by "Be ye warmed and be ye filled, giving nothing." But the Holy Ghost gives, He intercedes with Jesus; He gives us promises, He gives us grace, and so He comforts us. He is always a successful Comforter; He never attempts what He cannot accomplish.

Then He is an ever-present Comforter, so that you never have to send for Him. Your God is always near you, and when you need comfort in your distress, behold, the Word is nigh thee, it is in thy mouth, and in thy heart; He is an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Chapter 7: The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax

The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax

Babbling fame ever loves to talk of one man or another. Some there be whose glory she trumpets forth, and whose honour she extols above the heavens. Some are her favourites, and their names are carved on marble, and heard in every land, and every clime. Fame is not an impartial judge; she has her favourites. Some men she extols, exalts, and almost deifies; others, whose virtues are far greater, and whose characters are more deserving of commendation, she passes by unheeded, and puts the finger of silence on her lips. You will generally find that those persons beloved by fame are men made of brass or iron, and cast in a rough mould. Fame careseth Caesar, because he ruled the earth with a rod of iron. Fame loves Luther, because he boldly and manfully defied the Pope of Rome, and with knit brow dared laugh at the thunders of the Vatican. Fame admires Knox; for he was stern, and proved himself the bravest of the brave. Generally, you will find her choosing out the men of fire and mettle, who stood before their fellow-creatures fearless of them; men who were made of courage; who were consolidated lumps of fearlessness, and never knew what timidity might be. But you know there is another class of persons equally virtuous, and equally to be esteemed—perhaps even more so—whom fame entirely forgets. You do not hear her talk of the gentle-minded Melancthon—she says but little of him—yet he did as much, perhaps, in the Reformation, as even the mighty Luther. You do not hear fame talk much of the sweet and blessed Rutherford, and of the heavenly words that distilled from his lips; or of Archbishop Leighton, of whom it was said, that he was never out of temper in his life. She loves the rough granite peaks that defy the storm-cloud: she does not care for the more humble stone in the valley, on which the weary traveller resteth; she wants something bold and prominent; something that courts popularity; something that stands out before the world. She does not care for those who retreat in shade.

Hence it is, that the blessed Jesus, our adorable Master, has escaped fame. No one says much about Jesus, except His followers. We do not find His name written amongst the great and mighty men; though, in truth, He is the greatest, mightiest, holiest, purest, and best of men that ever lived; but because He was "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and was emphatically the Man whose kingdom is not of this world; because He had nothing of the rough about Him, but was all love; because His words were softer than butter, His utterances more gentle in their flow than oil; because never man spake so gently as this Man; therefore He is neglected and forgotten. He did not come to be a conqueror with his sword, nor a Mahomet with his fiery eloquence; but He came to speak with a "still small voice," that melteth the rocky heart; that bindeth up the broken in spirit; and that continually saith, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden"; "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Jesus Christ was all gentleness; and this is why He has not been extolled amongst men as otherwise He would have been. The work of God's Holy Spirit begins with bruising. In order to be saved, the fallow ground must be ploughed up; the hard heart must be broken; the rock must be split in sunder. An old divine says there is no going to heaven without passing hard by the gates of

hell—without a great deal of soul-trouble and heart-exercise. I take it then that the bruised reed is a picture of the poor sinner when first God commences his operation upon the soul; he is as a bruised reed, almost entirely broken and consumed; there is but little strength in him. The smoking flax I conceive to be a backsliding Christian; one who has been a burning and a shining light in his day, but by neglect of the means of grace, the withdrawal of God's Spirit, and falling into sin, his light is almost gone out—not quite—it never can go out, for Christ saith, "I will not quench it;" but it becomes like a lamp when ill supplied with oil—almost useless. It is not extinguished—it smokes—it was a useful lamp once, but now it has become as smoking flax. So I think these metaphors very likely describe the contrite sinner as a bruised reed, and the backsliding Christian as smoking flax. However, I shall not choose to make such a division as that, but I shall put both the metaphors together, and I hope we may fetch out a few thoughts from them.

What in the world is weaker than the bruised reed, or the smoking flax? A reed that groweth in the fen or marsh, let but the wild duck light upon it, and it snaps; let but the foot of man brush against it and it is bruised and broken; every wind that comes howling across the river makes it shake to and fro, and well nigh tears it up by the roots. You can conceive of nothing more frail or brittle, or whose existence depends more upon circumstances than a bruised reed. Then look at a smoking flax—what is it? It has a spark within, it is true, but it is almost smothered; an infant's breath might blow it out; or the tears of a maiden quench it in a moment; nothing has a more precarious existence than the little spark hidden in the smoking flax. Weak things, you see, are here described. Well, Christ says of them, "The smoking flax I will not quench; the bruised reed I will not break."

Some of God's children, blessed be His name, are made strong to do mighty works for Him; God hath His Samsons here and there who can pull up Gaza's gates, and carry them to the top of the hill; He hath here and there His mighty Gideons, who can go to the camp of the Midianites, and overthrow their hosts; He hath His mighty men, who can go into the pit in winter, and slay the lions; but the majority of His people are a timid, weak race. They are like the starlings that are frightened at every passer by; a little, fearful flock. If temptation comes, they fall before it; if trial comes, they are overwhelmed by it: their frail skiff is danced up and down by every wave; and when the wind comes, they are drifted along like a sea-bird on the crest of the billows; weak things, without strength, without force, without might, without power. Full often I am constrained to say, I would, but cannot sing; I would, but cannot pray; I would, but cannot believe. You are saying that you cannot do anything; your best resolves are weak and vain; and when you cry, "My strength renew," you feel weaker than before. You are weak, are you? Bruised reeds and smoking flax? I am glad you can come in under the denomination of weak ones, for here is a promise that He will never break nor quench them, but will sustain and hold them up.

I have heard of a man who would pick up a pin as he walked along the street, on the principle of economy; but I never yet heard of a man who would stop to pick up bruised reeds. They are not worth having. Who would care to have a bruised reed—a piece of rush lying on the ground? We all despise it as worthless. And smoking flax, what is the worth of that? It is an offensive and noxious thing; but the worth of it is nothing. No one would give the snap of a finger for either the bruised reed or smoking flax.

Well, then, in our estimation there are many of us who are worthless things. There are some, who, if they could weigh themselves in the scales of the sanctuary, and put their own hearts into the balance of conscience, would appear to be good for nothing—worthless, useless. There was a time when you thought yourselves to be the very best people in the world—when if anyone had said that you had more than you deserved, you would have kicked at it, and said, "I believe I am as good as other people." You thought yourselves something wonderful—extremely worthy of God's love and regard; but now you feel yourselves to be worthless. Sometimes you imagine God can hardly know where you are, you are such a despicable creature—so worthless—not worth His consideration. You can understand how He can look upon an animalcule in a drop of water, or upon a grain of dust in the sunbeam, or upon the insect of the summer evening; but you can hardly tell how He can think of you, you appear so worthless—a dead blank in the world, a useless thing. You say, "What good am I? I am doing nothing. As for a minister of the gospel, he is of some service: as for a deacon of the church, he is of some use; as for a Sabbath-school teacher, he is doing some good; but of what service am I? But you might ask the same question here. What is the use of a bruised reed? Can a man lean upon it? Can a man strengthen himself therewith? Shall it be a pillar in my house? Can you bind it up into the pipes of Pan, and make music come from a bruised reed? Ah! no; it is of no service. And of what use is smoking flax? The midnight traveller cannot be lighted by it; the student cannot read by the flame of it. It is of no use: men throw it into the fire and consume it. Ah! that is how you talk of yourselves. You are good for nothing, so are these things. But Christ will not throw you away because you are of no value. You do not know of what use you may be, and you cannot tell how Jesus Christ values you after all. There is a good woman, a mother, perhaps, she says, "Well, I do not often go out—I keep house with my children, and seem to be doing no good." Mother, do not say so, your position is a high, lofty, responsible one; and in training up children for the Lord, you are doing as much for his name as yon eloquent Apollos, who so valiantly preached the word. And you, poor man, all you can do is to toil from morning till night, and earn just enough to enable you to live day by day, you have nothing to give away, and when you go to the Sabbath-school, you can just read, you cannot teach much—well, but unto him to whom little is given of him little is required. Do you not know that there is such a thing as glorifying God by sweeping the street crossing? If two angels were sent down to earth, one to rule an empire, and the other to sweep a street, they would have no choice in the matter, so long as God ordered them. So God, in His providence, has called you to work hard for your daily bread; do it to His glory.

Chapter 8: Against the World

Against the World

We know there have been great battles where nations have met in strife, and one has overcome the other; but who has read of a victory that overcame the world? Some will say that Alexander was its conqueror; but I answer, nay. He was himself the vanquished man, even when all things were in his possession. He fought for the world, and won it; and then mark how it mastered its master, conquered its conqueror, and lashed the monarch who had been its scourge. See the royal youth weeping, and stretching out his hands with idiotic cries, for another world which he might ravage. He seemed, in outward show, to have overcome Old Earth; but, in reality, within his inmost soul, the earth had conquered him, had overwhelmed him, had wrapped him in the dream of ambition, girdled him with the chains of covetousness, so that when he had all, he was still dissatisfied; and, like a poor slave, was dragged on at the chariot wheels of the world, crying, moaning, lamenting, because he could not win another. Who is the man that ever overcame the world? Let him stand forward: he is a Triton among the minnows; he shall outshine Caesar; he shall outmatch even our own Wellington, if he can say he has overcome the world. It is so rare a thing, a victory so prodigious, a conquest so tremendous, that he who can claim to have won it may walk among his fellows, like Saul, with head and shoulders far above them. He shall command our respect; his very presence shall awe us into reverence; his speech shall persuade us to obedience; and, yielding honour to whom honour is due, we'll say when we listen to his voice, "'Tis even as if an angel shook his wings." The Christian overcomes the world. A tough battle: not one which carpet knights might win: no easy skirmish that he might win, who dashed to battle on some sunny day, looked at the host, then turned his courser's rein, and daintily dismounted at the door of his silken tent—not one which he shall gain, who, but a raw recruit to-day, puts on his regimentals, and foolishly imagines that one week of service will ensure a crown of glory. Nay, it is a life-long war—a fight needing the power of all these muscles, and this strong heart; a contest which shall want all our strength, if we are to be triumphant; and if we do come off more than conquerors, it shall be said of us, as Hart said of Jesus Christ: "He had strength enough and none to spare;" a battle at which the stoutest heart might quail; a fight at which the bravest might shake, if he did not remember that the Lord is on his side, and therefore, whom shall he fear? He is the strength of his life; of whom shall he be afraid? This fight with the world is not one of main force, or physical might; if it were, we might soon win it; but it is all the more dangerous from the fact that it is a strife of mind, a contest of heart, a struggle of the spirit, a strife of the soul. When we overcome the world in one fashion, we have not half done our work; for the world is a Proteus, changing its shape continually; like the chameleon, it hath all the colours of the rainbow; and when you have worsted the world in one shape, it will attack you in another. Until you die, you will always have fresh appearances of the world to wrestle with.

We rebel against the world's customs. And if we do so, what is the conduct of our enemy? She changes her aspect. "That man is a heretic; that man is a fanatic; he is a cant, he is a hypocrite," says the world directly. She grasps her sword, she putteth frowns upon her brow, she scowleth like

a demon, she girdeth tempests round about her, and she saith, "The man dares defy my government; he will not do as others do. Now I will persecute him. Slander! come from the depths of hell and hiss at him. Envy! sharpen up thy tooth and bite him." She fetches up all false things, and she persecutes the man. If she can, she does it with the hand; if not, by the tongue. She afflicts him wherever he is. She tries to ruin him in business; or, if he standeth forth as the champion of the truth, why then she laugheth, and mocketh, and scorneth. She lets no stone be unturned whereby she may injure him. What is then the behaviour of the Lord's warrior, when he sees the world take up arms against him, and when he sees all earth, like an army, coming to chase him, and utterly destroy him? Does he yield? Does he yield? Does he bend? Does he cringe? Oh, no! Like Luther, he writes "Cedo nulli" on his banner—"I yield to none;" and he goes to war against the world, if the world goes to war against him. The true-born child of God cares little for man's opinion. "Ah," says he, "let my bread fail me, let me be doomed to wander penniless the wide world o'er; yea, let me die: each drop of blood within these veins belongs to Christ, and I am ready to shed it for His name's sake." He counts all things but loss, that he may win Christ—that he may be found in him; and when the world's thunders roar, he smiles at the uproar, while he hums his pleasant tune. When her sword comes out, he looketh at it. "Ah," saith he, "just as the lightning leapeth from its thunder lair, splitteth the clouds, and affrighteth the stars, but is powerless against the rock-covered mountaineer, who smiles at its grandeur, so now the world cannot hurt me, for in the time of trouble my Father hides me in His pavillion, in the secret of His tabernacle doth He hide me, and set me up upon a rock." Thus, again, we conquer the world, by not caring for its frowns.

"Well," saith the world, "I will try another style," and this, believe me, is the most dangerous of all. A smiling world is worse than a frowning one. She saith, "I cannot smite the man low with my repeated blows, I will take off my mailed glove, and showing him a fair, white hand, I'll bid him kiss it. I will tell him I love him: I will flatter him, I will speak good words to him." John Bunyan well describes this Madam Bubble: she has a winning way with her; she drops a smile at the end of each of her sentences; she talks much of fair things, and tries to win and woo. Oh, believe me, Christians are not so much in danger when they are persecuted as when they are admired. When we stand upon the pinnacle of popularity, we may well tremble and fear. It is not when we are hissed at, and hooted, that we have any cause to be alarmed; it is when we are dandled on the lap of fortune, and nursed upon the knees of the people; it is when all men speak well of us, that woe is unto us. It is not in the cold, wintry wind that I take off my coat of righteousness, and throw it away; it is when the sun comes, when the weather is warm, and the air balmy, that I unguardedly strip off my robes, and become naked. Good God! how many a man has been made naked by the love of this world! The world has flattered and applauded him; he has drunk the flattery; it was an intoxicating draught; he has staggered, he has reeled, he has sinned, he has lost his reputation; and as a comet that erst flashed across the sky, doth wander far into space, and is lost in darkness, so doth he; great as he was, he falls; mighty as he was, he wanders, and is lost. But the true child of God is never so; he is as safe when the world smiles, as when it frowns; he cares as little for her praise as for her dispraise. If he is praised, and it is true, he says, "My deeds deserve praise, but I refer all honour to my God." Great souls know what they merit from their critic; to them it is nothing more than the giving of their daily income. Some men cannot live without a large amount of praise; and if they have no more than they deserve, let them have it. If they are children of God, they will be kept steady; they will not be ruined or spoiled; but they will stand with feet like

hinds' feet upon high places,—“This is the victory that overcometh the world.”

Sometimes, again, the world turns jailer to a Christian. God sends affliction and sorrow, until life is a prison-house, the world its jailer—and a wretched jailer too. Have you ever been in trials and troubles, my friends? and has the world never come to you, and said, “Poor prisoner, I have a key that will let you out. You are in pecuniary difficulties; I will tell you how you may get free. Put that Mr. Conscience away. He asks you whether it is a dishonest act. Never mind about him; let him sleep; think about the honesty after you have got the money, and repent at your leisure.” So saith the world; but you say, “I cannot do the thing.” “Well,” says the world, “then groan and grumble: a good man like you locked up in this prison!” “No,” says the Christian, “my Father sent me into want, and in His own time He will fetch me out; but if I die here I will not use wrong means to escape. My Father put me here for my good, I will not grumble; if my bones must lie here—if my coffin is to be under these stones—if my tombstone shall be in the wall of my dungeon—here will I die, rather than so much as lift a finger to get out by unfair means.” “Ah,” says the world, “then thou art a fool.” The scorner laughs and passes on, saying, “The man has no brain, he will not do a bold thing; he has no courage; he will not launch upon the sea; he wants to go in the old beaten track of morality.” Ay, so he does; for thus he overcomes the world.

I might tell of battles that have been fought. There has been many a poor maiden, who has worked, worked, worked, until her fingers were worn to the bone, to earn a scanty living out of the things which we wear upon us, knowing not that oftentimes we wear the blood, and bones, and sinews of poor girls. That poor girl has been tempted a thousand times, the evil one has tried to seduce her, but she has fought a valiant battle; stern in her integrity, in the midst of poverty she still stands upright, “Clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners,” a heroine unconquered by the temptations and enticements of vice. In other cases: many a man has had the chance of being rich in an hour, affluent in a moment, if he would but clutch something which he dare not look at, because God within him said, “No.” The world said, “Be rich, be rich;” but the Holy Spirit said, “No! be honest; serve thy God.” Oh, the stern contest, and the manly combat carried on within the heart! But he said, “No; could I have the stars transmuted into worlds of gold, I would not for those globes of wealth belie my principles, and damage my soul:” thus he walks a conqueror. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Chapter 9: The Divine Refuge

The Divine Refuge The children of Israel, while they were in Egypt, and in the wilderness, were a type of God's visible Church on earth. Moses was speaking primarily of them, but, secondarily, of all the chosen ones of God in every age. Now, as God was the shelter of His ancient people Israel, so is He the refuge of His saints through all time. And, first, He was eminently their shelter when they were under bondage and the yoke was heavy. When they had to make bricks without straw, and the task-masters oppressed them, then the people cried unto the Lord, and God heard their cry, and sent unto them His servant Moses. So also, there often comes to men a time when they begin to feel the oppression of Satan. I believe that many ungodly men feel the slavery of their position. Even some of those who are never converted, have sense enough to feel at times that the service of Satan is a hard one, yielding but little pleasure, and involving awful risks. Some men cannot long go on making bricks without straw, without being more or less conscious that they are in the house of bondage. These, who are not God's people, under the pressure of mind consequent upon a partial discovery of their state, turn to some form of pleasure, or self-righteousness, in order to forget their burden and yoke; but God's elect people, moved by a higher power, are led to cry unto their God. It is one of the first signs of a chosen soul, that it seems to know, as if by heavenly instinct, where its true refuge is.

You recollect that, although you knew but little of Christ, though in doctrinal matters you were very dark, though you did not understand, perhaps, even your own need, yet there was a something in you that made you pray, and gave you to see that only at the mercy-seat could you find your refuge. Before you were a Christian, before you could say—"Christ is mine," your bedside was the witness to many flowing tears, when your aching heart poured itself out before God, perhaps in strains like these: "O God, I want something; I do not know what it is I want, but I feel a heaviness of spirit; my mind is burdened, and I feel that Thou only canst unburden me. I know that I am a sinner; oh, that Thou wouldest forgive me! I hardly understand the plan of salvation, but one thing I know, that I want to be saved; I would arise and go unto my Father: my heart panteth to make Thy bosom my refuge." Now, I say that this is one of the first indications that such a soul is one of God's chosen, for it is true, just as it was of Israel in Egypt, that God is the refuge of His people, even when they are under the yoke. When captivity is led captive, the Eternal God becomes the refuge of His people from their sins. The Israelites were brought out of Egypt; they were free; albeit they were marching they knew not whither, yet their chains were snapped; they were emancipated, and needed not to call any man Master. But see, Pharaoh is wroth, and he pursues them; with his horses and his chariots he hastens after them. The enemy said: "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them." Thus also there is a period in the spiritual life, when sin labours to drag back the sinner who has newly escaped from it. Like hosts ready for battle, all the poor sinner's past iniquities hurry after him, and overtake him in a place where his way is hedged in. The poor fugitive would escape, but he cannot; what, then, must he do? You remember that then Moses cried unto the Lord. When nothing else could be found to afford shelter to the poor escaped slaves, when the Red Sea rolled before them, and the

mountains shut them in on either side, and an angry foe pursued them, there was one road which was not stopped up, and that was the king's highway upward to the throne, the way to their God, and therefore they began at once to travel that road, lifting up their hearts in humble prayer to God, trusting that He would deliver them. You know the story too, how the uplifted rod divided the watery deeps, how the people passed through the sea as a horse through the wilderness, and how the Lord brought all the hosts of Egypt into the depths of the sea, that He might utterly destroy them, so that not one of them was left, and those who had seen them one day saw them no more for ever. In this sense, God is the refuge of His people still. Our sins which pursued us so hotly have been drowned in the depths of the Saviour's blood. They sank to the bottom like stones, the depths have covered them, there is not one, no, not one of them left, and we, standing upon the shore in safety, can shout in triumph over our drowned sins, "Sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, and all our iniquities hath He cast into the midst of the sea.

While God is thus the refuge of His people under the yoke, and when sin seeks to overcome them, He is also their refuge in times of want. The children of Israel journeyed into the wilderness, but there was nothing for them to feed upon there; the arid sand yielded them neither leeks, nor garlic, nor cucumbers; and no brooks or rivers, like the Nile, were there to quench their thirst; they would have famished, if they had been left to depend upon the natural productions of the soil. They came to Marah, where there was a well, but the water was very bitter; at other stations there were no wells whatever, and even bitter water was not to be had. What then? Why, the unfailing refuge of God's people in the wilderness was prayer. Moses, their representative, always betook himself to the Most High, at times falling upon his face in agony, and at other seasons climbing to the top of the hill, and there pleading in solemn communion with God, that He would deliver the people; and you have heard full often how men did eat angels' food in the desert; how Jehovah rained bread from heaven upon His people in the howling wilderness, and how He smote the rock, and waters gushed forth. You have not forgotten how the strong wind blew, and brought them flesh, so that they ate and were satisfied. Israel had no need unsupplied; their garments waxed not old, and though they went through the wilderness, their feet grew not sore. God supplied all their wants. We in our land must go to the baker, the butcher, the clothier, and many others, in order to equip ourselves fully, but the men of Israel went to God for everything. We have to store up our money and buy this in one place, and that in the other, but the Eternal God was their refuge and their resort for everything, and in every time of want they had nothing to do but to lift up their voice to him. Now it is just so with us spiritually. Faith sees our position to-day to be just that of the children of Israel then: whatever our wants are, the Eternal God is our refuge. God has promised you that your bread shall be given you, and that your water shall be sure. He who gives spirituals will not deny temporals; the Mighty Master will never suffer you to perish, while He has it in His power to succour you. Go to Him, whatever may be the trouble which weighs you down. Do not suppose your case too bad, for nothing is too hard for the Lord, and dream not that He will refuse to undertake temporals as well as spirituals; He careth for you in all things. In everything you are to give thanks, and surely in everything by prayer and supplication, you may make known your wants unto God. In times when the cruse of oil is ready to fail, and the handful of meal is all but spent, then go to the all-sufficient God, and you shall find that they who trust in Him shall not lack any good thing.

Furthermore, our God is the refuge of His saints when their enemies rage. When the host was passing through the wilderness they were suddenly attacked by the Amalekites. Unprovoked, these marauders of the desert set upon them, and smote the hindermost of them, but what did Israel do? The people did not ask to have a strong body of horsemen, hired out of the land of Egypt for their refuge, or even if they did wish it, he who was their wiser self, Moses, looked to another arm than that of man, for he cried unto God. How glorious is that picture of Moses, with uplifted hands, upon the top of the hill giving victory to Joshua in the plain below. Those uplifted arms were worth ten thousand men to the hosts of Israel; nay, twice ten thousand had not so easily gotten a victory, as did those two extended arms, which brought down Omnipotence itself from heaven. This was Israel's master-weapon of war, their confidence in God. Joshua shall go forth with men of war, but the Lord, Jehovah-nissi, is the banner of the fight, and the giver of the victory. Thus the Eternal God is our refuge. When our foes rage, we need not fear their fury. Let us not seek to be without enemies, but let us take our case and spread it before God. We cannot be in such a position, that the weapons of our foes can hurt us, while the promise stands good: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Though earth and hell should unite in malice, the Eternal God is our castle and stronghold, securing to us an everlasting refuge.

Chapter 10: The Use of Chastisement

The Use of Chastisement

God's people can never by any possibility be punished for their sins. God has punished them already in the person of Christ; Christ, their substitute, has endured the full penalty for all their guilt, and neither the justice nor the love of God can ever exact again that which Christ has paid. Punishment can never happen to a child of God in the judicial sense; He can never be brought before God as his Judge, as charged with guilt, because that guilt was long ago transferred to the shoulders of Christ, and the punishment was exacted at the hands of his surety. But yet, while the sin cannot be punished, while the Christian cannot be condemned, he can be chastised; while he shall never be arraigned before God's bar as a criminal, and punished for his guilt, yet he now stands in a new relationship—that of a child to his parent: and as a son he may be chastised on account of sin. Folly is bound up in the heart of all God's children, and the rod of the Father must bring that folly out of them. It is essential to observe the distinction between punishment and chastisement. Punishment and chastisement may agree as to the nature of the suffering: the one suffering may be as great as the other, the sinner who, while he is punished for his guilt, may suffer no more in this life than the Christian who is only chastised by his parent. They do not differ as to the nature of the punishment, but they differ in the mind of the punisher and in the relationship of the person who is punished. God punishes the sinner on His own account, because He is angry with the sinner, and His justice must be avenged, His law must be honoured, and His commands must have their dignity maintained. But He does not punish the believer on his own account; it is on the Christian's account, to do him good. He afflicts him for his profit, He lays on the rod for His child's advantage; He has a good design towards the person who receives the chastisement. While in punishment the design is simply with God for God's glory; in chastisement, it is with the person chastised for his good, for his spiritual profit and benefit. Besides, punishment is laid on a man in anger; God strikes him in wrath, but when He afflicts His child, chastisement is applied in love, His strokes are, all of them, put there by the hand of love. The rod has been baptized in deep affection before it is laid on the believer's back. God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve us for nought, but out of love and affection, because He perceives that if He leaves us unchastised, we shall bring upon ourselves misery ten thousand-fold greater than we shall suffer by His slight rebukes, and the gentle blows of His hand. Take this in the very starting, that whatever thy trouble, or thine affliction, there cannot be anything punitive in it; thou must never say: "Now God is punishing me for my sin." Thou hast fallen from thy steadfastness when thou talkest so. God cannot do that He has once for all done it. "The chastisement of our peace was upon HIM, and by HIS stripes we are healed." He is chastising thee, not punishing thee; He is correcting thee in measure, He is not smiting thee in wrath. There is no hot displeasure in His heart. Even though His brow may be ruffled, there is no anger in His breast; even though His eye may have closed upon thee, He hates thee not; He loves thee still. He is not wroth with His heritage, for He seeth no sin in Jacob, neither iniquity in Israel, considered in the person of Christ. It is simply because He loves you, because ye are sons, that He therefore chastises you.

Why shouldst thou murmur against the dispensations of thy heavenly Father? Can He treat thee more hardly than thou deservest? Consider what a rebel thou wast once, but He has pardoned thee. Surely, if He chooses now to lay the rod upon thee, thou needest not cry out. Hast thou not read, that amongst the Roman emperors of old it was the custom when they would set a slave at liberty, to give him a blow upon the head, and then say, "Go free?" This blow which thy Father gives thee is a token of thy liberty, and dost thou grumble because He smites thee rather hardly? After all, are not His strokes fewer than thy crimes, and lighter than thy guilt? Art thou smitten as hardly as thy sins deserve? Consider the corruption that is in thy breast, and then wilt thou wonder that there needs so much of the rod to fetch it out? Weigh thyself, and discern how much dross is mingled with thy gold; and dost thou think the fire too hot to get away so much dross as thou hast? Why, thou hast not the furnace hot enough, methinks. There is too much dross, too little fire; the rod is not laid on hardly enough, for that proud spirit of thine proves that thy heart is not thoroughly sanctified; and though it may be right with God, thy words do not sound like it, and thine actions do not portray the holiness of thy nature. It is the Old Adam within thee that is groaning. Take heed if thou murmurest, for it will go hard with murmurers. God always chastises His children twice if they do not bear the first blow patiently. I have often heard a father say; "Boy, if you cry for that, you shall have something to cry for by-and-by." So, if we murmur at a little, God gives us something that will make us cry. If we groan for nothing, He will give us something that will make us groan. Sit down in patience; despise not the chastening of the Lord; be not angry with Him, for He is not angry with thee; say not that He deals so hardly with thee. Let humility rise up and speak—"It is well, O Lord! Just as Thou art in Thy chastising, for I have sinned; righteous art Thou in Thy blows, for I need them to fetch me near to Thee; for if Thou dost leave me uncorrected and unchastised, I, a poor wanderer, must pass away to the gulf of death, and sink into the pit of eternal perdition." There is the first sense in which we may despise the chastening of the Lord: we may murmur under it.

There are certain things that happen to us in life, which we immediately set down for a providence. If a grandfather of ours should die and leave us five hundred pounds, what a merciful providence that would be! If by something strange in business we were suddenly to accumulate a fortune, that would be a blessed providence! If an accident happens, and we are preserved, and our limbs are not hurt, that is always a providence. But suppose we were to lose five hundred pounds, would not that be a providence? Suppose our establishment should break up, and business fail, would not that be a providence? Suppose we should during the accident break our leg, would not that be a providence? There is the difficulty. It is always a providence when it is a good thing. But why is it not a providence when it does not happen to be just as we please? Surely it is so; for if the one thing be ordered by God so is the other. It is written, "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things." But I question whether that is not despising the chastening of the Lord, when we set a prosperous providence before an adverse one, for I do think that an adverse providence ought to be the cause of as much thankfulness as a prosperous one; and if it is not, we are violating the command, "In everything give thanks." But we say, "Of what use will such trial be to me? I cannot see that it can by any possibility be useful to my soul. Here I was growing in grace just now, but there is something that has damped all my ardour, and overthrown my zeal. Just now I was on the mount of assurance, and God has brought me to the valley of humiliation. Can that be any good to me? A few weeks ago I had wealth, and I distributed it in the cause of God; now I have none. What can be the use of that? All these things are against

me." Now, you are despising the chastening of the Lord, when you say that is of no use. No child thinks the rod of much value. Anything in the house is of more use than that rod in his opinion. And if you were to ask the child which part of the household furniture could be dispensed with, he would like chairs, tables, and everything else to remain but that; the rod he does not think of any good whatever. He despises the rod. Ah! and so do we. We think it cannot benefit us; we want to get rid of the rod and turn it away. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." Let me show thee how wrong thou art. What! doth thine ignorance effect to say that God is unwise? I thought it was written that He was too wise to err; and I did think that thou wast a believer, that He was too good to be unkind. And doth thy little wisdom arrogate to itself the chair of honour? Doth thy finite knowledge stand up before thy Maker and tell Him He is unwise in what He doth? Wilt thou dare to say that one of His purposes shall be unfulfilled, that He does an unwise act? Oh, then, thou art impudently arrogant; thou art impudently ignorant if thou wilt thus speak! Say not so, but bend meekly down before His superior wisdom, and say, "O God I believe that in the darkness Thou art brewing light, that in the storm-clouds Thou art gathering sunshine, that in the deep mines Thou art fashioning diamonds, and in the beds of the sea Thou art making pearls. I believe that however unfathomable may be thy designs, yet they have a bottom. Though it is in the whirlwind and in the storm, Thou hast a way, and that way is good and righteous altogether. I would not have thee alter one atom of thy dispensations; it shall be just as thou wilt. I bow before thee, and I give my ignorance the word to hold its tongue, and to be silenced while Thy wisdom speaketh words of right." "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" by thinking that it can be of no possible service to thee.

Many a man has been corrected by God, and that correction has been in vain. I have known Christian men, men who have committed some sin; God, by the rod, would have shown them the evil of that sin; they have been smitten and seen the sin, and never afterwards corrected it. That is despising the chastening of the Lord. When a father chastises a son for anything he has done, and the boy does it again directly, it shows that he despises his father's chastening; and so have we seen Christians who have had an error in their lives, and God has chastened them on account of it, but they have done it again. Ah! you will remember there was a man named Eli. God chastened him once when He sent Samuel to tell him dreadful news—that because he had not reproofed his children, those children should be destroyed; but Eli kept on the same as ever; he despised the chastening of the Lord although his ears were made to tingle: and in a little while God did something else for him. His sons were taken away, and then it was too late to mend, for the children were gone. The time he might have reformed, his character had passed away. How many of you get chastened of God, and do not hear the rod! There are many deaf souls that do not hear God's rod; many Christians are blind and cannot see God's purposes, and when God would take some folly out of them the folly is still retained. It is not every affliction that benefits the Christian; it is only a sanctified affliction. It is not every trial that purifies an heir of light, it is only a trial that God Himself sanctifies by His grace. Take heed if God is trying you, that you search and find out the reason. Are the consolations of God small with you? Then, there is some reason for it. Have you lost that joy you once felt? There is some cause for it. Many a man would not have half so much suffered if he would but look to the cause of it. I have sometimes walked a mile or two, almost limping along because there was a stone in my shoe, and I did not stop to look for it. And many a Christian goes limping for years because of the stones in his shoe, but if he would only stop to look for them, he would be relieved. What is the sin that is causing you pain? Get it out, and take away

the sin, for if you do not, you have not regarded this admonition which speaketh unto you as unto sons—"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord."

Chapter 11: Ministers and Success

Ministers and Success The minister is not responsible for his success. He is responsible for what he preaches; he is accountable for his life and actions; but he is not responsible for other people. If I do but preach God's word, if there never were a soul saved, the King would say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" If I do but tell my message, if none should listen to it, He would say:—"Thou hast fought the good fight: receive thy crown." You hear the words of the text: "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, as well in them that perish, as in them that are saved." This will appear, if I just tell you what a gospel minister is called in the Bible. Sometimes he is called an ambassador. Now, for what is an ambassador responsible? He goes to a country as a plenipotentiary; he carries terms of peace to the conference; he uses all his talents for his master; he tries to show that the war is inimical to the prosperity of the different countries; he endeavours to bring about peace; but the other kings haughtily refuse it. When he comes home does his master say, "Why did not you make peace?" "Why, my Lord," he would say, "I told them the terms; but they said nothing." "Well, then," he will say, "thou hast done thy duty; I am not to condemn thee if the war continues." Again: the minister of the gospel is called a fisherman. Now a fisherman is not responsible for the quantity of fish he catches, but for the way he fishes. That is a mercy for some ministers, I am sure, for they have neither caught fish, nor even attracted any round their nets. They have been spending all their life fishing with most elegant silk lines, and gold and silver hooks; they always use nicely polished phrases; but the fish will not bite for all that, whereas we of a rougher order have put the hook into the jaws of hundreds. However, if we cast the gospel net in the right place, even if we catch none, the Master will find no fault with us. He will say: "Fisherman! didst thou labour? Didst thou throw the net into the sea in the time of storms?" "Yes, my Lord, I did." "What hast thou caught?" "Only one or two." "Well, I could have sent thee a shoal, if it so pleased me; it is not thy fault; I give in my sovereignty where I please; or withhold when I choose; but as for thee, thou hast well laboured, therefore there is thy reward." Sometimes the minister is called a sower. Now, no farmer expects a sower to be responsible for the harvest; all he is responsible for is, does he sow the seed? and does he sow the right seed? If he scatters it on good soil, then he is happy; but if it falls by the way-side, and the fowls of the air devour it, who shall blame the sower? Could he help it? Nay, he did his duty; he scattered the seed broad-cast, and there he left it Who is to blame? Certainly not the sower. So if a minister comes to heaven with but one sheaf on his shoulder, his Master will say, "O reaper! once a sower! where didst thou gather thy sheaf?" "My Lord, I sowed upon the rock, and it would not grow; only one seed on a chance Sabbath-morning was blown a little awry by the wind, and it fell upon a prepared heart; and this is my one sheaf." "Hallelujah!" the angelic choirs resound, "one sheaf from a rock is more honour to God than a thousand sheaves from a good soil; therefore, let him take his seat as near the throne as yon man, who, stooping beneath his many sheaves, comes from some fertile land, bringing his sheaves with him." I believe that if there are degrees in glory, they will not be in proportion to success, but in proportion to the earnestness of our endeavours. If we mean right, and if with all our heart we strive to do the right thing as ministers if we never see any effect, still shall we receive the crown. But how much more happy is the man who shall have it in heaven said

to him: "He shines for ever, because He was wise, and won many souls unto righteousness." It is always my greatest joy to believe, that if I should enter heaven, I shall in future days see heaven's gates open, and in shall fly a cherub, who, looking me in the face, will smilingly pass along to God's throne, and there bow down before Him; and when he has paid his homage and his adoration, he may fly to me, and though unknown, shall clasp my hand, and if there were tears in heaven, surely I should weep, and he would say: "Brother, from Thy lips I heard the word; Thy voice first admonished me of my sin; here I am, and Thou the instrument of my salvation." And as the gates open one after another, still will they come in; souls ransomed, souls ransomed; and for each one of these a star; for each one of these another gem in the diadem of glory; for each one of them another honour, and another note in the song of praise. Blessed be that man that shall die in the Lord, and his works shall follow him; for thus saith the Spirit.

What will become of some good Christians if crowns in heaven are measured in value by the souls that are saved? Some of you will have a crown in heaven without a single star in it. I read a little while ago, a piece upon the starless crown in heaven—a man in heaven with a crown without a star! Not one saved by him! He will sit in heaven as happy as he can be, for sovereign mercy saved him; but oh! to be in heaven without a single star! Mother! what sayest thou to be in heaven without one of thy children to deck thy brow with a star? Minister! what wouldst thou say to be a polished preacher, and yet have no star? Writer! will it well become thee to have written even as gloriously as Milton, if thou shouldst be found in heaven without a star? I am afraid we pay too little regard to this. Men will sit down and write huge folios and tomes, that they may have them put in libraries for ever, and have their names handed down by fame! but how few are looking to win stars for ever in heaven! Toil on; child of God, toil on; for if thou wishest to serve God, thy bread cast upon the waters shall be found after many days. If thou sendest in the feet of the ox or the ass, thou shalt reap a glorious harvest in that day when He comes to gather in His elect. The minister is not responsible for his success. But yet to preach the gospel is high and solemn work. The minister has been very often degraded into a trade. In these days men are taken and made into ministers who would have made good captains at sea, who could have waited well at the counter, but who were never intended for the pulpit. They are selected by man; they are crammed with literature; they are educated up to a certain point; they are turned out ready dressed; and persons call them ministers. I wish them all God-speed, every one of them; for as good Joseph Irons used to say, "God be with many of them, if it be only to make them hold their tongues." Man-made ministers are of no use in this world, and the sooner we get rid of them the better. Their way is this: they prepare their manuscripts very carefully, then read it on the Sunday most sweetly in sotto voce, and so the people go away pleased. But that is not God's way of preaching. If so, I am sufficient to preach for ever. I can buy manuscript sermons for a shilling; that is to say, provided they have been preached fifty times before, but if I use them for the first time the price is a guinea, or more. But that is not the way. Preaching God's word is not what some seem to think, mere child's play—a mere business or trade to be taken up by any one. A man ought to feel first that he has a solemn call to it; next, he ought to know that he really possesses the Spirit of God, and that when he speaks there is an influence upon him that enables him to speak as God would have him, otherwise out of the pulpit he should go directly; he has no right to be there, even if the living is his own property. He has not been called to preach God's truth, and unto him God says: "What hast thou to do, to declare My statutes?"

What is there difficult about preaching God's gospel? Well it must be somewhat hard; for Paul said: "Who is sufficient for these things?" And first I will tell you, it is difficult because it is so hard as not to be warped by your own prejudices in preaching the word. You want to say a stern thing; and your heart says: "Master! in so doing thou wilt condemn thyself;" then the temptation is not to say it. Another trial is, you are afraid of displeasing the rich in your congregations. You think: "If I say such-and-such a thing, so-and-so will be offended; such an one does not approve of that doctrine; I had better leave it out." Or perhaps you will happen to win the applause of the multitude, and you must not say anything that will displease them, for if they cry, "Hosanna" to-day, they will cry, "Crucify, crucify," to-morrow. All these things work on a minister's heart. He is a man, and he feels it. Then comes again the sharp knife of criticism, and the arrows of those who hate him and hate his Lord; and he cannot help feeling it sometimes. He may put on his armour, and cry, "I care not for your malice;" but there were seasons when the archers sorely grieved even Joseph. Then he stands in another danger, lest he should come out and defend himself; for he is a great fool whoever tries to do it. He who lets his detractors alone, and like the eagle cares not for the chattering of the sparrows, or like the lion will not turn aside to rend the snarling jackal—he is the man, and he shall be honoured. But the danger is, we want to set ourselves right. And oh! who is sufficient to steer clear from these rocks of danger? "Who is sufficient for these things?" To stand up, and to proclaim, Sabbath after Sabbath, and week-day after week-day, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Chapter 12: Season of Darkness

Seasons of Darkness

Night appears to be a time peculiarly favourable to devotion. Its solemn stillness helps to free the mind from that perpetual din which the cares of the world will bring around it; and the stars looking down from heaven upon us shine as if they would attract us up to God. I know not how you may be affected by the solemnities of midnight, but when I have sat alone musing on the great God and the mighty universe, I have felt that indeed I could worship Him: for night seemed to be spread abroad as a very temple for adoration, while the moon walked as high priest, amid the stars, the worshippers, and I myself joined in that silent song which they sang unto God: "Great art Thou, O God! great are Thy works. When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" I find that this sense of the power of midnight not only acts upon religious men, but there is a certain poet, whose character, perhaps, I could scarcely too much reprobate: a man very far from understanding true religion; one whom I may, I suppose, justly style an infidel, a libertine of the worst order, and yet he says concerning night in one of his poems:—

"'Tis midnight on the mountains' brown, The cold round moon shines deeply down;

Blue roll the waters, blue the sky Spreads like an ocean hung on high, Bespangled with those isles of light, So wildly, spiritually bright; Who ever gazed upon them shining, And turning to earth without repining, Nor wish'd for wings to flee away, And mix with their eternal ray."

Even with the most irreligious person, a man farthest from spiritual thought, it seems that there is some power in the grandeur and stillness of night to draw him up to God. I trust many of us can say, like David, "I have thought upon Thee continually; I have mused upon Thy name in the night watches, and with desire have I desired Thee in the night." The Christian man has not always a bright shining sun: he has seasons of darkness and of night. True, it is written in God's Word: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and it is a great truth that religion—the true religion of the living God—is calculated to give a man happiness below as well as bliss above. But, notwithstanding, experience tells us that if the course of the just be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," yet sometimes that light is eclipsed. At certain periods clouds and darkness cover the sun, and he beholds no clear shining of the daylight, but walks in darkness and sees no light.

Now there are many who have rejoiced in the presence of God for a season; they have basked in the sunshine God has been pleased to give them in the earlier stages of their Christian career; they have walked along the "green pastures," by the side of the "still waters," and suddenly—in a month or two—they find that glorious sky is clouded; instead of "green pastures," they have to tread the sandy desert; in the place of "still waters," they find streams brackish to their taste and bitter to their spirits, and they say, "Surely, if I were a child of God this would not happen." Oh, say not so, thou who art walking in darkness! The best of God's saints have their nights; the dearest of

His children have to walk through a weary wilderness. There is not a Christian who has enjoyed perpetual happiness; there is no believer who can always sing a song of joy. It is not every lark that can always carol. It is not every star that can always be seen. And not every Christian is always happy. Perhaps the King of saints gave you a season of great joy at first because you were a raw recruit, and He would not put you into the roughest part of the battle when you had first enlisted. You were a tender plant, and He nursed you in the hot-house till you could stand severe weather. You were a young child, and therefore He wrapped you in furs and clothed you in the softest mantle. But now you have become strong, and the case is different. Capuan holidays do not suit Roman soldiers; and they would not agree with Christians. We need clouds and darkness to exercise our faith; to cut off self-dependence, and make us put more faith in Christ, and less in evidence, less in experience, less in frames and feelings. The best of God's children—I repeat it again for the comfort of those who are suffering depression of spirits—have their nights. Sometimes it is a night over the whole Church at once. There are times when Zion is under a cloud; when the whole fine gold becomes dim, and the glory of Zion is departed. There are seasons when we do not hear the clear preaching of the Word; when the doctrines are withheld; when the glory of the Lord God of Jacob is dim; when His name is not exalted; when the traditions of men are taught, instead of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. And such a season is that when the whole Church is dark. Of course, each Christian participates in it. He goes about and weeps, and cries, "O God, how long shall poor Zion be depressed? How long shall her shepherds be 'dumb dogs that cannot bark?' Shall her watchmen be always blind? Shall the silver trumpet sound no more? Shall not the voice of the gospel be heard in her streets?" Oh, there are seasons of darkness to the entire Church! God grant we may not have to pass through another, but that, starting from this period, the sun may rise ne'er to set, till, like a sea of glory, the light of brilliance shall spread from pole to pole! At other times, this darkness over the soul of the Christian rises from temporal distresses. He may have had a misfortune as it is called—something has gone wrong in his business, or an enemy has done somewhat against him; death has struck down a favourite child—bereavement has snatched away the darling of his bosom; the crops are blighted; the winds refuse to bear his ships homeward; a vessel strikes upon a rock, another founders; all goes ill with him, and, like a gentleman who called to see me, he may be able to say, "Sir, I prospered far more when I was a worldly man than I have done since I have become a Christian: for, since then, everything has appeared to go wrong with me. I thought," he said, "that religion had the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come." I told him, Yes, it had; and so it should be in the end. But he must remember there was one great legacy which Christ left His people; and I was glad he had come in for a share of it—"In the world ye shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace." Yes! you may be troubled about this, you may be saying, "Look at so-and-so: see how he spreads himself like a green bay-tree. He is an extortioner and wicked man, yet everything he does prospers. You may even observe his death, and say, there are no bands in his death." "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men." God hath set them in slippery places, but he casteth them down to destruction. Better to have a Christian's days of sorrow, than a worldling's days of mirth. Better to have a Christian's sorrows than a worldling's joys. Ah! happier to be chained in a dungeon with a Paul than reign in the palace with an Ahab. Better to be a child of God in poverty than a child of Satan in riches. Cheer up, then, thou downcast spirit, if this be thy trial. Remember that many saints have passed through the same; and the best and most eminent believers have had their nights.

Christian men very frequently have their nights; but a Christian man's religion will keep its colour in the night. "With my soul have I desired Thee in the night." What a mighty deal of silver-slipper religion we have in this world! Men will follow Christ when every one cries, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" The multitude will crowd around the Man then, and they will take Him by force and make Him a king when the sun shines, when the soft wind blows. They are like the plants upon the rock, which sprang up and for a little while were green; but when the sun had risen with fervent heat straightway withered away. Demas and Mr. Hold-the-world, and a great many others, are very pious people in easy times. They will always go with Christ by daylight, and will keep in company so long as fashion gives religion the doubtful benefit of its patronage. But they will not go with Him in the night. There are some goods whose colour you can only see by daylight—and there are many professors the colour of whom you can only see by daylight. If they were in the night of trouble and persecutions you would find that there was very little in them. They are good by daylight, but they are bad by night. Do you not know that the best test of a Christian is the night? The nightingale, if she would sing by day when every goose is cackling, would be reckoned no better a musician than the wren. A Christian if he only remained steadfast by daylight, when every coward is bold, what would he be? There would be no beauty in his courage, no glory in his bravery. But it is because he can sing at night—sing in trouble—sing when he is driven well-nigh to despair; it is this which proves his sincerity. It has its glory in the night. The stars are not visible by daylight, but they become apparent when the sun is set. There is full many a Christian whose piety did not burn much when he was in prosperity; but it will be known in adversity.

I have marked it in some of my brethren when they were in deep trial. I had not heard them discourse much about Christ before, but when God's hand had robbed them of their comfort, I remember that I could discern their religion infinitely better than I could before. Nothing can bring our religion out better than that. Grind the diamond a little and you shall see it glisten. Do but put a trouble on the Christian, and his endurance of it will prove him to be of the true seed of Israel.

All that the Christian wants in the night is his God. "With desire have I desired Thee in the night." By day there are many things that a Christian will desire besides his Lord; but in the night he wants nothing but his God. I cannot understand how it is unless it is to be accounted for by the corruption of our spirit, that when everything goes well with us we are setting our affection first on this object and then on another, and then on another; and that desire which is as insatiable as death and as deep as hell never rests satisfied. We are always wanting something, always desiring a yet-beyond. But if you place a Christian in trouble you will find that he does not want gold then—that he does not want carnal honour—then he wants his God. I suppose he is like the sailor, when he sails along smoothly he loves to have fair weather, and wants this and that to amuse himself with on deck. But when the winds blow all that he wants is the haven. He does not desire anything else. The biscuit may be mouldy, but he does not care. The water may be brackish, but he does not care. He does not think of it in the storm. He only thinks about the haven then. It is just so with the Christian; when he is going along smoothly he wants this and that comfort; he is aspiring after this position, or is wanting to obtain this and that elevation. But let him once doubt his interest in Christ—let him once get into some soul-distress and trouble so that it is very dark—and all he will feel then is, "With desire have I desired Thee in the night." When the child is put upstairs to bed it may lie while the light is there, and look at the trees that shake against the window, and admire the stars that are coming out; but when it gets dark and the child is still awake

it cries for its parent. It cannot be amused by aught else. So in daylight will the Christian look at anything. He will cast his eyes round on this pleasure and on that; but, when the darkness gathers, it is, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" "O why art thou so far from me and from the word of my roaring?"

Chapter 13; Lacking Joy and Peace

Lacking Joy and Peace

There is a large number of persons who profess to have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, but who assert that they have no joy and peace in consequence thereof. They do not make this profession by union with the Christian church or in any open manner, but when they are hard pushed upon the matter of personal salvation, they will sometimes tell us, "I do believe in Christ, but still I am so unhappy, I am so miserable, that I cannot believe that I am saved;" the statement being tantamount to this, that the Word of God declares that whosoever believeth in Jesus is not condemned; but they assert that they have believed in Jesus, and nevertheless they are haunted with fears of condemnation which lead them to believe that they cannot have been delivered from the wrath to come. I speak to tender hearts, or to those who desire to have tender hearts; to those who have their faces towards Jerusalem, though as yet they are travelling in the dark. If you are really desirous to obtain joy and peace through believing, we trust God may bless you to the obtaining of it.

Take care, while valuing joy and peace, that you do not over-estimate them; for remember that joy and peace are, though eminently desirable, not infallible evidences of safety. There are many persons who have great joy and much peace who are not saved, for their joy springs from a mistake, and their peace is the false peace which does not rest upon the rock of divine truth but upon the sand of their own imaginations. It is certainly a good sign that the spring is come, that you find the weather to be so warm, but there are very mild days in winter. I must not therefore infer because the heat of the sun is at such and such a degree, that therefore it is necessarily spring. And, on the other hand, we have cold days which, if we had to judge by such evidences, might betoken that we were rather in November than May. And so, joy and peace are like fine sunny days. They come to those that have no faith, that are in the winter of their unbelief, and they may not visit you who have believed; or, if they come, they may not abide, for there may be cold weather in May, and there may be some sorrow and some distress of mind even to a truly believing soul. Understand, that you must not look upon the possession of joy and peace as being the absolutely necessary consequence of your being saved. A man may be in the lifeboat, but that lifeboat may be so tossed about that he may still feel himself exceedingly ill, and think himself to be still in peril. It is not his sense of safety that makes him safe; he is safe because he is in the lifeboat, whether he is sensible of this or not. Understand then that joy and peace are not infallible or indispensable evidences of safety, and that they certainly are not unchanging evidences. The brightest Christians lose their joy, and some of those that stand well in the things of God, and concerning whom you would entertain no doubt, entertain a great many suspicions, however, about themselves. Joy and peace are the element of a Christian, but he is sometimes out of his element: joy and peace are his usual states, but there are times when, with fightings within and wars without, his joy departs, and his peace is broken. The leaves on the tree prove that the tree is alive, but the absence of leaves will not prove that the tree is dead. True joy and peace may be very satisfactory evidences, but the absence of joy and peace, during certain seasons, can often

be accounted for on some other hypothesis than that of there being no faith within. To trust Christ because you just feel happy is in the first place irrational. Now suppose a man should have said during the last panic, "I feel sure that the Bank my money is in is safe." Why? "Because I feel so easy about my money." Now anybody would say to him, "That is no reason." Suppose he said, "I feel sure that my money is safe;" and you had said, "What is the reason?" "Why because I believe the Bank is safe." "Oh," say you, "that is right enough: that is good reasoning." But here you put the effect in the place of the cause, and try to make that a cause, but you cannot do it. If a man should say, "I have got a large estate in India." How do you know? "Why because I feel so happy in thinking about it." "Why, you fool," say you, "that is no proof whatever, not the slightest." But if he says to you, "I feel very happy," and you ask him why, and he replies, "Because I have got an estate in India." "Oh," say you, "that may be right enough." A man may be thankful for that which he rightly possesses, but to make joy and peace the evidence of facts from without, is supremely ridiculous; and for a man to say, "I know I am saved, because I am happy," is most irrational, while to be happy because you are saved is right enough. Oh, I pray you, take care that you do not act thus irrationally before God! Or take another view. Suppose me to be in fear about the health of some dear friend. "Well," I say, "I should like to have my friend healthy, but I want to feel myself safe about that friend. I do not know anything about the state of my friend just now, and I am uneasy. Now I can tell you if I could get to feel easy, then I should be convinced that my friend was well." "Why," you would justly reply, "there is no connection between the two things. The proper mode of procedure is to try and find out whether your friend is well, then you will feel easy." Now, you say, "I should believe I was saved if I felt happy." Why, is there any reason in that? On the contrary, first of all believe that you are saved, and then happiness shall come of it; and you cannot believe that you are saved while you persist in doing what God does not tell you to do, namely, to look to your own joy and peace, instead of looking to the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Christian men are but men, and they may have a bad liver or an attack of bile, or some trial, and then they get depressed if they have ever so much grace. I would defy the apostle Paul himself to help it. But what then? Why then you can get joy and peace through believing. I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to, but I always get back again by this—I know I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in Him, and if He falls I shall fall with Him, but if He does not, I shall not. Because He lives, I shall live also, and I spring to my legs again and fight with my depressions of spirit and my downcastings, and get the victory through it; and so may you do, and so you must, for there is no other way of escaping from it. In your most depressed seasons you are to get joy and peace through believing. "Ah!" says one, "but suppose you have fallen into some great sin—what then?" Why then the more reason that you should cast yourself upon Him. Do you think Jesus Christ is only for little sinners? Is He a doctor that only heals finger-aches? It is no faith to trust Christ when I have not any sin, but it is true faith when I am foul, and black, and filthy; when during the day I have tripped up and fallen, and done serious damage to my joy and peace, to go back again to that dear fountain and say, "Lord, I never loved washing so much before as I do to-night, for to-day I have made a fool of myself; I have said and done what I ought not to have done, and I am ashamed and full of confusion, but I believe Christ can save me, even me, and I will rest in Him still."

Chapter 14: Mr. Read-To Halt and His Companions

Mr. Ready-To-Halt and His Companions When faith first commences in the soul, it is like a grain of mustard seed, of which the Saviour said it was the least of all seeds; but as God the Holy Spirit is pleased to bedew it with the sacred moisture of His grace, it germinates and grows and begins to spread, until at last it becomes a great tree. To use another figure: when faith commences in the soul it is simply looking unto Jesus, and perhaps even then there are so many clouds of doubts, and so much dimness of the eye, that we have need for the light of the Spirit to shine upon the cross before we are able even so much as to see it. When faith grows a little, it rises from looking to Christ to coming to Christ. He who stood afar off and looked to the cross by-and-bye plucks up courage, and getting heart to himself, he runneth up to the cross; or perhaps he doth not run, but hath to be drawn before he can so much as creep thither, and even then it is with a limping gait that he draweth nigh to Christ the Saviour. But that done, faith goeth a little farther: it layeth hold on Christ; it begins to see Him in His excellency, and appropriates Him in some degree, conceives Him to be a real Christ and a real Saviour, and is convinced of His suitability. And when it hath done as much as that, it goeth further; it leaneth on Christ; it leaneth on its Beloved; casteth all the burden of its cares, sorrows, and griefs upon that blessed shoulder, and permitteth all its sins to be swallowed up in the great red sea of the Saviour's blood.

Faith can go further still; for having seen and ran towards Him, and laid hold upon Him, and having leaned upon Him, faith in the next place puts in a humble, but a sure and certain claim to all that Christ is and all that He has wrought; and then, trusting alone in this, appropriating all this to itself, faith mounteth to full assurance; and out of heaven there is no state more rapturous and blessed. But faith is but very small, and there are some Christians who never get out of little faith all the while they are here. You notice in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, how many Little-faiths he mentions. There is our old friend Ready-to-halt, who went all the way to the Celestial City on crutches, but left them when he went into the river Jordan. Then there is little Feeble-mind, who carried his feeble-mind with him all the way to the banks of the river and then left it, and ordered it to be buried in a dunghill that none might inherit it. Then there is Mr. Fearing, too, who used to stumble over a straw, and was always frightened if he saw a drop of rain, because he thought the floods of heaven were let loose upon him. And you remember Mr. Despondency and Miss Much-afraid, who were so long locked up in the dungeon of Giant Despair, that they were almost starved to death, and there was little left of them but skin and bone; and poor Mr. Feeble-mind, who had been taken into the cave of Giant Slay-good who was about to eat him, when Great-heart came to his deliverance. John Bunyan was a very wise man. He has put a great many of those characters in his book because there are a great many of them. He has not left us with one Mr. Ready-to-halt, but he has given us seven or eight graphic characters because he himself in his own time has been one of them, and he had known many others who had walked in the same path.

Little-faith is quite as sure of heaven as Great-faith. When Jesus Christ counts up His Jewels at the last day He will take to Himself the little pearls as well as the great ones. If a diamond be never

so small yet it is precious because it is a diamond. So will faith, be it never so little, if it be true faith, Christ will never lose even the smallest jewel of His crown. Little-faith is always sure of heaven, because the name of Little-faith is in the book of eternal life. Life-faith was chosen of God before the foundation of the world. Little-faith was bought with the blood of Christ; ay, and he cost as much as Great-faith. "For every man a shekel" was the price of redemption. Every man, whether great or small, prince or peasant, had to redeem himself with a shekel. Christ has bought all, both little and great, with the same most precious blood. Little-faith is always sure of heaven, for God has begun the good work in him and He will carry it on. God loves him and He will love him unto the end. God has provided a crown for him, and He will not allow the crown to hang there without a head; he has erected for him a mansion in heaven and He will not allow the mansion to stand untenanted for ever. Little-faith is always safe, but he very seldom knows it. If you meet him he is sometimes afraid of hell; very often afraid that the wrath of God abideth on him. He will tell you that the country on the other side of the flood can never belong to a worm so base as he. Sometimes it is because he feels himself so unworthy, another time it is because the things of God are too good to be true, he says, or he cannot think they can be true to such an one as he is. Sometimes he is afraid he is not elect; another time he fears that he has not been called aright, that he has not come to Christ aright. Another time his fears are that he will not hold on to the end, that he shall not be able to persevere; and if you kill a thousand of his fears he is sure to have another host by to-morrow; for unbelief is one of those things that you cannot destroy. "It hath," saith Bunyan, "as many lives as a cat;" you may kill it over and over again, but still it lives. It is one of those ill weeds that sleep in the soil even after it has been burned, and it only needs a little encouragement to grow again. Now Great-faith is sure of heaven, and he knows it. He climbs Pisgah's top, and views the landscape o'er; he drinks in the mysteries of paradise even before he enters within the pearly gates. He sees the streets that are paved with gold; he beholds the walls of the city, the foundations whereof are precious stones; he hears the mystic music of the glorified, and begins to smell on earth the perfumes of heaven. But poor Little-faith can scarcely look at the sun; he very seldom sees the light; he gropes in the valley, and while all is safe he always thinks himself unsafe. Strong-faith can well contest with the enemy. Satan comes along, and says, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." "Nay," we say, "thou canst not give us all these things, for they are ours already." "Nay," says he, "but ye are poor, naked and miserable." "Ay," say we to him, "but still these things are ours, and it is good for us to be poor, good for us to be without earthly goods, or else our Father would give them to us." "Oh," says Satan "you deceive yourselves; you have no portion in these things; but if you will serve me, then I will make you rich and happy here." Strong-faith says, "Serve thee, thou fiend! Avaunt! Dost thou offer me silver?—behold God giveth me gold. Dost thou say to me, 'I will give thee this if thou disobey?'—fool that thou art! I have a thousand times as great wages for my obedience as thou canst offer for my disobedience." But when Satan meets Little-faith, he says to him, "If thou be the Son of God cast thyself down;" and poor Little-faith is so afraid that he is not a Son of God that he is very apt to cast himself down upon the supposition. "There," says Satan, "I will give thee all this if thou wilt disobey." Little-faith says, "I am not quite sure that I am a child of God, that I have a portion among them that are sanctified;" and he is very apt to fall into sin by reason of the littleness of his faith. Yet at the same time I must observe that I have seen some Little-faiths who are far less apt to fall into sin than others. They have been so cautious that they dared not put one foot before the other, because they were afraid they should put it awry: they scarcely even dared to open their

lips, but they prayed, "O Lord, open Thou my lips;" afraid that they should let a wrong word out, if they were to speak; always alarmed lest they should be falling into sin unconsciously, having a very tender conscience.

Well, I like people of this sort. I have sometimes thought that Little-faith holds tighter by Christ than any other. For a man who is very near drowning is sure to clutch the plank all the tighter with the grasp of a drowning man, which tightens and becomes more clenched the more his hope is decreased. Little-faith may be kept from falling, but this is the fruit of tender conscience and not of little faith. Careful walking is not the result of little faith; it may go with it, and so may keep Little-faith from perishing, but little faith is in itself a dangerous thing, laying us open to innumerable temptations, and taking away very much of our strength to resist them. "The joy of the Lord is your strength;" and if that joy ceases you become weak and very apt to turn aside. Little-faiths have many nights and few days, very long winters and very short summers, many howlings, but very little of shouting; often playing upon the pipe mourning, but very seldom sounding the trump exultation.

Perhaps the only way in which most men get their faith increased is by great trouble. We don't grow strong in faith on sunshine days. It is only in strong weather that a man gets faith. Faith is not an attainment that droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven; it generally comes in the whirlwind and the storm. Look at the old oaks: how is it that they have become so deeply rooted in the earth? Ask the March winds and they will tell you. It is not the April shower that did it, or the sweet May sunshine, but it was March's rough wind, the blustering month of old Boreas shaking the tree to and fro and causing the roots to bind themselves around the rocks. So must it be with us. We don't make great soldiers in the barracks at home; they must be made amidst flying shot and thundering cannon. We cannot expect to make good sailors on the Serpentine; they must be made far away on the deep sea, where the wild winds howl, and the thunders roll like drums in the march of the God of armies. Storms and tempests are the things that make men tough and hardy mariners. They see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. So with Christians. Great-faith must have great trials. Mr. Great-heart would never have been Mr. Great-heart if he had not once been Mr. Great-trouble. Valiant-for-truth would never have put to flight those foes, and have been so valiant, if the foes had not first attacked him. So with us: we must expect great trouble before we shall attain to much faith.

Chapter 15: Joy In Life's Hard Times

Joy in Life's Hard Times "At evening time it shall be light."

I shall not notice the particular occasion upon which these words were uttered, or try to discover the time to which they more especially refer; I shall rather take the sentence as a rule of the kingdom, as one of the great laws of God's dispensation of grace, that "at evening time it shall be light." Whenever philosophers wish to establish a general law, they think it necessary to collect a considerable number of individual instances; these being put together, they then infer from them a general rule. Happily, this need not be done with regard to God. We have no need, when we look abroad in providence, to collect a great number of incidents, and then from them infer the truth; for since God is immutable, one act of His grace is enough to teach us the rule of His conduct. Now, I find, in one place, it is recorded that, on a certain occasion, during a certain adverse condition of a nation, God promised that at evening time it should be light. If I found that in any human writing, I should suppose that the thing might have occurred once, that a blessing was conferred in emergency on a certain occasion, but I could not from it deduce a rule; but when I find this written in the Book of God, that on a certain occasion when it was evening time with His people God was pleased to give them light, I feel myself more than justified in deducing from it the rule, that always to His people at evening time there shall be light. The Church at large has had many evening-times. If I might derive a figure to describe her history from anything in this lower world, I should describe her as being like the sea. At times the abundance of grace has been gloriously manifest. Wave upon wave has triumphantly rolled in upon the land, covering the mire of sin, and claiming the earth for the Lord of Hosts. So rapid has been its progress that its course could scarce be obstructed by the rocks of sin and vice. Complete conquest seemed to be foretold by the continual spread of the truth. The happy Church thought that the day of her ultimate triumph had certainly arrived, so potent was her Word by her ministers, so glorious was the Lord in the midst of her armies, that nothing could stand against her. She was "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Heresies and schisms were swept away, false gods and idols lost their thrones; Jehovah Omnipotent was in the midst of His church, and He upon the white horse rode forth conquering and to conquer. Before long, however, you find it always has happened that there came an ebb-tide. Again the stream of grace seemed to recede, the poor Church was driven back either by persecution or by internal decay; instead of gaining upon man's corruptions it seemed as if man's corruption gained on her; and where once there had been righteousness like the waves of the sea, there was the black mud and mire of the filthiness of mankind. Mournful tunes the Church had to sing, when by the rivers of Babylon she sat down and wept, remembering her former glories, and weeping her present desolation. So has it always been—progressing, retrograding, standing still a while, and then progressing once more, and falling back again. The whole history of the Church has been a history of onward marches, and then of quick retreats—a history which, I believe, is, on the whole, a history of advance and growth, but which, read chapter by chapter, is a mixture of success and repulse, conquest and discouragement. And so I think it will be, even to the last. We shall have our sunrises, our meridian

noon, and then the sinking in the west; we shall have our sweet dawns of better days, our Reformations, our Luthers and our Calvins; we shall have our bright full noontide, when the gospel is fully preached, and the power of God is known; we shall have our sunset of ecclesiastical weakness and decay. But just as sure as the evening-tide seems to be drawing over the Church, "at evening time it shall be light."

We may expect to see darker evening times than have ever been beheld. Let us not imagine that our civilization shall be more enduring than any other that has gone before it, unless the Lord shall preserve it. It may be that the suggestion will be realized which has often been laughed at as folly, that one day men should sit upon the broken arches of London Bridge, and marvel at the civilization that has departed, just as men walk over the mounds of Nimrod, and marvel at cities buried there. It is just possible that all the civilization of this country may die out in blackest night; it may be that God will repeat again the great story which has been so often told: "I looked, and lo, in the vision I saw a great and terrible beast, and it ruled the nations, but lo, it passed away and was not." But if ever such things should be—if the world should ever have to return to barbarism and darkness—if instead of what we sometimes hope for, a constant progress to the brightest day, all our hopes should be blasted, let us rest quite satisfied that "at evening time there shall be light," that the end of the world's history shall be an end of glory. However red with blood, however black with sin the world may yet be, she shall one day be as pure and perfect as when she was created. The day shall come when this poor planet shall find herself unrobed of those swaddling bands of darkness that have kept her lustre from breaking forth. God shall yet cause His name to be known from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof,

"And the shout of jubilee, Loud as mighty thunders roar, Or the fulness of the sea, When it breaks upon the shore, Shall yet be heard the wide world o'er."

"At evening time it shall be light."

We know that in nature the very same law that rules the atom, governs also the starry orbs.

"The very law that moulds a tear, And bids it trickle from its source, That law preserves the earth a sphere, And guides the planets in their course."

It is even so with the laws of grace. "At evening time it shall be light" to the Church; "at evening time it shall be light" to every individual. Christian, let us descend to lowly things. Thou hast had thy bright days in temporal matters: thou hast sometimes been greatly blessed: thou canst remember the day when the calf was in the stall, when the olive yielded its fruit, and the fig-tree did not deny its harvest; thou canst recollect the years when the barn was almost bursting with the corn, and when the vat overflowed with the oil; thou rememberest when the stream of thy life was deep, and thy ship floated softly on, without one disturbing billow of trouble to molest it. Thou saidst in those days, "I shall see no sorrow; God hath hedged me about; He hath preserved me; He hath kept me; I am the darling of His providence; I know that all things work together for my good, for I can see it is plainly so."

Well, Christian, thou hast after that had a sunset; the sun which shone so brightly, began to cast his rays in a more oblique manner every moment, until at last the shadows were long, for the sun was setting, and the clouds began to gather; and though the light of God's countenance tinged those clouds with glory, yet it was waxing dark. Then troubles lowered o'er thee; thy family

sickened, thy wife was dead, thy crops were meagre, and thy daily income was diminished, thy cupboard was no more full, thou wast wondering for thy daily bread; thou didst not know what should become of thee, mayhap thou wast brought very low; the keel of thy vessel did grate upon the rocks; there was not enough of bounty to float thy ship above the rocks of poverty. You used both industry and economy, and you added thereunto perseverance; but all in vain. It was in vain that you rose up early, and sat up late, and ate the bread of carefulness; nothing could you do to deliver yourself, for all attempts failed. You were ready to die in despair. You thought the night of your life had gathered with eternal blackness. You would not live always, but had rather depart from this vale of tears. Was it not light with thee at evening time? The time of thine extremity was just the moment of God's opportunity. When the tide had run out to its very furthest, then it began to turn; thine ebb had its flow; thy winter had its summer; thy sunset had its sunrise; "at evening time it was light." On a sudden by some strange work of God, as thou didst think it then, thou wast completely delivered. He brought out thy righteousness like the light, and thy glory as the noonday. The Lord appeared for thee in the days of old; He stretched out His hand from above; He drew thee out of deep waters; He set thee upon a rock and established thy goings.

Chapter 16: Cure For Heart Ache

Cure for Heart-Ache

It is the easiest thing in the world in times of difficulty to let the heart be troubled; it is very natural to us to give up and drift with the stream, to feel that it is of no use "taking arms against" such "a sea of trouble," but that it is better to lie passive and to say, "If one must be ruined, so let it be." Despairing idleness is easy enough, especially to evil, rebellious spirits, who are willing enough to get into further mischief that they may have wherewithal to blame God the more, against whose providence they have quarrelled. Our Lord will not have us be so rebellious. He bids us pluck up heart and be of good courage in the worst possible condition, and here is the wisdom of his advice, namely, that a troubled heart will not help us in our difficulties or out of them. It has never been perceived in time of drought that lamentations have brought showers of rain, or that in seasons of frost, doubtings, fears, and discouragements, have produced a thaw. We have never heard of a man whose business was declining, who managed to multiply the number of his customers by unbelief in God. I do not remember reading of a person whose wife or child was sick, who discovered any miraculous healing power in rebellion against the Most High. It is a dark night, but the darkness of your heart will not light a candle for you. It is a terrible tempest, but to quench the fires of comfort and open the doors to admit the howling winds into the chambers of your spirit will not stay the storm. No good comes out of fretful, petulant, unbelieving heart-trouble. This lion yields no honey. If it would help you, you might reasonably sit down and weep till the tears had washed away your woe. If it were really to some practical benefit to be suspicious of God and distrustful of Providence, why then you might have a shadow of excuse; but as this is a mine out of which no one ever digged any silver, as this is a fishery out of which the diver never brought up a pearl, we would say, Renounce that which cannot be of service to you; for as it can do no good, it is certain that it does much mischief. A doubting, fretful spirit takes from us the joys we have. You have not all you could wish, but you have still more than you deserve. Your circumstances are not what they might be, but still they are not even now so bad as the circumstances of some others. Your unbelief makes you forget that still health remains to you if poverty oppresses you; or that if both health and abundance have departed, you are a child of God, and your name is not blotted out from the roll of the chosen. There are flowers that bloom in winter, if we have but grace to see them. Never was there a night of the soul so dark but what some lone star of hope might be discerned, and never a spiritual tempest so tremendous but what there was a haven into which the soul could put if it had but enough confidence in God to make a run for it. Rest assured that though you have fallen very low, you might have fallen lower if it were not that underneath are the everlasting arms. A doubting, distrustful spirit will wither the few blossoms which remain upon your bough, and if half the wells be frozen by affliction, unbelief will freeze the other half by its despondency. You will win no good, but you may get incalculable mischief by a troubled heart; it is a root which bears no fruit except wormwood. A troubled heart makes that which is bad worse. It magnifies, aggravates, caricatures, misrepresents. If but an ordinary foe is in your way, a troubled heart makes him swell into a giant.

"We were in their sight but as grasshoppers," said the ten evil spies, "yea, and we were but as grasshoppers in our own sight when we saw them." But it was not so. No doubt the men were very tall, but they were not so big after all as to make an ordinary six-foot man look like a grasshopper. Their fears made them grasshoppers by first making them fools. If they had possessed but ordinary courage they would have been men, but being cowardly, they subsided into grasshoppers. After all, what is an extra three, four, or five feet of flesh to a man? Is not the bravest soul the tallest? If he be of shorter stature, be but nimble and courageous, he will have the best of it; little David made short work of great Goliath. Yet so it is; unbelief makes out our difficulties to be most gigantic, and then it leads us to suppose that never soul had such difficulties before, and so we egotistically lament, "I am the man that hath seen affliction;" we claim to be peers in the realm of misery, if not the emperors of the kingdom of grief.

Yet it is not so. Why? What ails you? The head-ache is excruciating! Well, it is bad enough, but what wouldst thou say if thou hadst seven such aches at once, and cold and nakedness to back them! The twitches of rheumatism are horrible! Right well can I endorse that statement! But what then? Why, there have been men who have lived with such tortures thrice told all their lives, like Baxter, who could tell all his bones because each one had made itself heard by its own peculiar pang. What is our complaint compared with the diseases of Calvin, the man who preached at break of every day to the students in the cathedral, and worked on till long past midnight, and was all the while a mass of disease, a complicated agony? You are poor? ah yes! But you have your own room, scanty as it is, and there are hundreds in the workhouse who find sorry comfort there. It is true you have to work hard! ay! but think of the Huguenot galley slave in the old times, who for the love of Christ was bound with chains to the oar, and scarce knew rest day nor night. Think of the sufferings of the martyrs of Smithfield, or of the saints who rotted in their prisons. Above all, let your eye turn to the great Apostle and High Priest of your profession, and "consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be weary and faint in your mind."

"His way was much rougher and darker than mine, Did Jesus thus suffer, and shall I repine?"

Yet this is the habit of unbelief to draw our picture in the blackest possible colours, to tell us that the road is unusually rough and utterly impassable, that the storm is such a tornado as never blew before, and that our name will be down in the wreck register, and that it is impossible that we should ever reach the haven. Be of good cheer, soldier, the battle must soon end; and that blood-stained banner, when it shall wave so high, and that shout of triumph, when it shall thrill from so many thousand lips, and that grand assembly of heroes, all of them made more than conquerors, and the sight of the King in His beauty, riding in the chariot of His triumph, paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem, and the acclamations of spirits glorified, and the shouts and pæns of cherubims and seraphims—all these shall make up for all the fightings of to-day,—

"And they who, with their Master, Have conquer'd in the fight, For ever and for ever Are clad in robes of light."

Chapter 17: A Word to the Troubled

A Word to the Troubled Of all things in the world to be dreaded despair is the chief. Let a man be abandoned to despair, and he is ready for all sorts of sins. When fear unnerves him action is dangerous; but when despair has loosed his joints and paralysed his conscience, the vultures hover round him waiting for their prey. As long as a man has hope for himself you may have hope of him; but Satan's object is to drive out the last idea of hope from men, that then they may give themselves up to be his slaves for ever. Let me just say to those who are in trouble—and I hope every faithful Christian will repeat what I say again and again—There is hope. There is hope about your pecuniary difficulties, about your sickness, about your present affliction. God can help you through it. Do not sit down with your elbows on your knees and cry all day. That will not get you through it. Call upon God who sent the trouble. He has a great design in it. It may be that He has sent it as a shepherd sends his black dog to fetch the wandering sheep to him. It may be He has a design in making you lose temporal things that you may gain eternal things. Many a mother's soul had not been saved if it had not been for that dear infant which was taken from her bosom; not till it was taken to the skies did God give the attractive influence which drew her heart to pursue the path to heaven. Do not say there is no hope; other people have been as badly off as you are; and even if it should seem as if it had come to straitness of bread, yet still there is hope.

Go and try again on Monday morning. God's providence has a thousand ways of helping us if we have but the heart to pray. Are you in despair about your character? It may be that there is somewhere here a woman who says, "I have fallen; my character is gone; there is no hope for me." My sister, there is lifting up; some who have fallen as terribly as you have done have been restored by sovereign grace. And there may be one here who has been a drunkard, or about to become a thief—no one knows it, perhaps, but he is conscious of great degradation, and he says, "I shall never be able to look my fellow men in the face." Ah, my dear friend, you do not know what Christ can do for you if you but rest and trust in Him. Supposing you should be made into a new creature, would not that alter the matter? "Oh!" say you, "but that can never be." Nay, say I, but that shall be, for Christ saith, "Behold, I make all things new." "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature." There was an old fable about a spring at which old men washed their faces, and then grew young. Now there is a spring which welled up from the heart of the Lord Jesus, and if an old sinner wash therein, not only his face, but his whole spirit, shall become like unto a little child, and shall be clean even in the sight of God. There is hope still.

"Ah!" says one, "but you do not know my case." No, my dear friend, and I do not particularly desire to know it, because this sweeping truth can meet it be it what it may. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Noah's ark was not made to hold a few mites, but the elephant went in, and the lion went in, and the hugest beasts of prey went in, and there was found room for each of them. So my Master, who is the great ark of salvation, did not come into this world to save a few who are little sinners, but "He is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him." See Him yonder, see Him on the cross, in agonies extreme, bearing griefs and torments numberless, and sweating

in agony, all for love of you who were His enemies. Trust him; trust Him, for there is hope; there is lifting up. However bowed down you may be, there is in the gospel hope even for you. I seem as if I were walking along a corridor, and I see a number of condemned cells. As I listen at the key-hole I can hear those inside weeping in doleful, dolorous dirges. "There is no hope, no hope, no hope!" And I can see the warder at the other end smiling calmly to himself, as he knows that none of the prisoners can come out as long as they say there is no hope. It is a sign that their manacles are not broken, and that the bolts of their cells are not removed. But oh! if I could look in! Methinks I can, methinks I can open the little wicket gate, and cry, "There is hope!" He who said there is no hope is a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies: there is hope since Jesus died; there is hope anywhere except in the infernal lake. There is hope in the hospital, where a man has sickened, and is within the last hour of his departure. There is hope, though men have sinned themselves beyond the pale of society; hope for the convict, though he has had to smart under the lash; hope for the man who has cast himself away. Able to save is Jesus still. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the mariners' life brigade while He sights the crew of the sinking vessel. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the fire brigade while he knows there are living men in the burning pile. "No hope" is not to be said by any one of the valiant brigade of the Christian church while the soul is still within reach of the sound of mercy. "No hope" is a cry which no human tongue should utter, which no human heart should heed. Oh, may God grant us grace whenever we get an opportunity to go and tell all we meet with that are bowed down, "There is lifting up." And tell them where it is likewise. Tell them it is only at the cross. Tell them it is through the precious blood. Tell them it is to be had for nothing, through simply trusting Christ. Tell them it is of free grace, that no merits of theirs are wanted, that no good things are they to bring, but that they may come just as they are, and find lifting up in Christ.

Still nothing will avail unless there be much prayer. We had need pray that God may give efficacy to the counsels he has given us, and reward our obedience to them with abundant fruit. Oh, brethren! prayer is the grand thing after all for us who have no might of ourselves. It is wonderful what prayer can do for any of us. A dear friend said the other day, "Look at Jacob. In the early part of his life there was much that was unseemly in his character, and very much that was unhappy in his circumstances. Crafty himself, he was often the victim of craft, reaping the fruit of his own ways. But one night in prayer—what a change it did make in him! Why it raised him from the deep poverty of a cunning supplanter to the noble peerage of a prince in Israel!" Bethel itself is hardly more memorable in his history than Peniel. And what might one night spent in prayer do for some of us? Supposing we were to try it instead of the soft bed! We need not go to the brook; enough that, like Jacob, we were left alone in some place where sighs and cries would be heard by none but God. One night spent thus in solitary prayer might put the spurs on some of you, and make you spiritual knights in God's army, able to do great exploits. Oh! yes; may all other gracious exercises be started in prayer, crowned with prayer, and perfected by much prayer.

Chapter 18: Things Working Together for Good

Things Working Together for Good

"We know that all things work." Look around, above, beneath, and all things work. They work, in opposition to idleness. The idle man that folds his arms or lies upon the bed of sloth is an exception to God's rule; for except himself all things work. There is not a star, though it seemeth to sleep in the deep blue firmament, which doth not travel its myriads of miles and work; there is not an ocean, or a river, which is not ever working, either clapping its thousand hands with storms, or bearing on its bosom the freight of nations. There is not a silent nook within the deepest forest glade where work is not going on. Nothing is idle. The world is a great machine, but it is never standing still: silently all through the watches of the night, and through the hours of day, the earth revolveth on its axis, and works out its predestinated course. Silently the forest groweth, anon it is felled; but all the while between its growing and felling it is at work. Everywhere the earth works; mountains work; nature in its inmost bowels is at work; even the centre of the great heart of the world is ever beating; sometimes we discover its working in the volcano and the earthquake, but even when most still all things are ever working.

They are ever working, too, in opposition to the word play. Not only are they ceaselessly active, but they are active for a purpose. We are apt to think that the motion of the world and the different evolutions of the stars are but like the turning round of a child's windmill; they produce nothing. That old preacher Solomon once said as much as that. He said: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits." But Solomon did not add, that things are not what they seem. The world is not at play; it hath an object in its wildest movement. Avalanche, hurricane, earthquake, are but order in an unusual form; destruction and death are but progress in veiled attire. Everything that is and is done, worketh out some great end and purpose. The great machine of this world is not only in motion, but there is something weaving in it, which as yet mortal eye hath not fully seen, which our text hinteth at when it says, It is working out for God's people.' And once again, all things work in opposition to Sabbath. We morally speak of work, especially on this day, as being the opposite of sacred rest and worship. Now, at the present moment all things work. Since the day when Adam fell all things have had to toil and labour. Before Adam's fall the world kept high and perpetual holiday; but now the world has come to its work-days, now it hath to toil. When Adam was in the garden the world had its Sabbath; and it shall never have another Sabbath till the Millenium shall dawn, and then when all things have ceased to work, and the kingdoms shall be given up to God, even the Father, then shall the world have her Sabbath, and shall rest; but at present all things do work.

Let us not wonder if we have to work, too. If we have to toil, let us remember, this is the world's week of toil. The 6,000 years of continual labour, and toil, and travail, have happened not to us alone, but to the whole of God's great universe; the whole world is groaning, and travailing. Let us

not be backward in doing our work. If all things are working, let us work, too—"work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when no man can work." And let the idle and slothful remember that they are a great anomaly; they are blots in the great work-writing of God; they mean nothing; in all the book of letters with which God has written out the great word "work," they are nothing at all. But let the man that worketh, though it be with the sweat of his brow and with aching hands, remember that he, if he is seeking to bless the Lord's people, is in sympathy with all things—not only in sympathy with their work, but in sympathy with their aim.

"All things work together." That is in opposition to their apparent confliction. Looking upon the world with the mere eye of sense and reason, we say, "Yes, all things work, but they work contrary to one another. There are opposite currents; the wind bloweth to the north, and to the south. The world's barque, it is true, is always tossed with waves, but these waves toss her first to the right and then to the left; they do not steadily bear her onward to her desired haven. It is true the world is always active, but it is with the activity of the battle-field, wherein hosts encounter hosts and the weaker are overcome." Be not deceived; it is not so; things are not what they seem; "all things work together." There is no opposition in God's providence; the raven wing of war is co-worker with the dove of peace. The tempest strives not with the peaceful calm—they are linked together and work together, although they seem to be in opposition. Look at our history. How many an event has seemed to be conflicting in its day, that has worked out good for us! The strifes of barons and kings for mastery might have been thought to be likely to tread out the last spark of British liberty; but they did rather kindle the pile. The various rebellions of nations, the heavings of society, the strife of anarchy, the tumults of war—all, all these things, overruled by God, have but made the chariot of the church progress more mightily; they have not failed of their predestinated purpose—"good for the people of God."

I know it is very hard to believe this. "What?" say you, "I have been sick for many a day, and wife and children, dependent on my daily labour, are crying for food: will this work together for my good?" So saith the Word, and so shalt thou find it ere long. "I have been in trade," says another, "and this commercial pressure has brought me exceedingly low, and distressed me: is it for my good?"

Thou art a Christian. I know thou dost not seriously ask the question, for thou knowest the answer of it. He who said, "All things work together," will soon prove to you that there is a harmony in the most discordant parts of your life. You shall find, when your biography is written, that the black page did but harmonize with the bright one—that the dark and cloudy day was but a glorious foil to set forth the brighter noontide of your joy. "All things work together." There is never a clash in the world: men think so, but it never is so. The charioteers of the Roman circus might with much cleverness and art, with glowing wheels, avoid each other; but God, with skill infinitely consummate, guides the fiery coursers of man's passion, yokes the storm, bits the tempest, and keeping each clear of the other, from seeming evil still enduceth good, and better still; and better still in infinite progression.

We must understand the word "together," also in another sense. "All things work together for good:" that is to say, none of them work separately. I remember an old divine using a very pithy and homely metaphor:—"All things work together for good; but perhaps, any one of those 'all things' might destroy us if taken alone. The physician, prescribes medicine; you go to the chemist,

and he makes it up; there is something taken from this drawer, something from that phial, something from that shelf: any one of those ingredients, it is very possible, would be a deadly poison, and kill you outright, if you should take it separately; but he puts one into the mortar, and then another, and then another, and when he has worked them all up with his pestle, and has made a compound, he gives them all to you as a whole, and together they work for your good, but any one of the ingredients might either have operated fatally, or in a manner detrimental to your health." Learn, then, that it is wrong to ask, concerning any particular act of providence, Is this for my good? Remember, it is not the one thing alone that is for your good; it is the one thing put with another thing, and that with a third, and that with a fourth, and all these mixed together, that work for your good. Your being sick very probably might not be for your good, only God has something to follow your sickness, some blessed deliverance to follow your poverty, and He knows that when He has mixed the different experiences of your life together, they shall produce good for your soul and eternal good for your spirit. We know right well that there are many things that happen to us in our lives that would be the ruin of us if we were always to continue in the same condition. Too much joy would intoxicate us, too much misery would drive us to despair: but the joy and the misery, the battle and the victory, the storm and the calm, all these compounded make that sacred elixir whereby God maketh all His people perfect through suffering, and leadeth them to ultimate happiness. "All things work together for good."

There are different senses to the word "good." There is the worldling's sense: "Who will show us any good?"—by which he means transient good, the good of the moment. "Who will put honey into my mouth? Who will feed my belly with hid treasures? Who will garnish my back with purple, and make my table groan with plenty?" That is "good,"—the vat bursting with wine, the barn full of corn! Now God has never promised that "all things shall work together" for such good as that to His people. Very likely all things will work together in a clean contrary way to that. Expect not, O Christian, that all things will work together to make thee rich; it is just possible they may all work to make thee poor. It may be that all the different providences that shall happen to thee will come wave upon wave, washing thy fortune upon the rocks, till it shall be wrecked, and then waves shall break o'er thee, till in that poor boat, the humble remnant of thy fortune, thou shalt be out on the wide sea, with none to help thee but God the Omnipotent. Expect not, then, that all things shall work together as for thy good. The Christian understands the word "good" in another sense. By "good," he understands spiritual good. "Ah!" saith he, "I do not call gold good, but I call faith good! I do not think it always for my good to increase in treasure, but I know it is good to grow in grace. I do not know that it is for my good that I should be respectable and walk in good society; but I know that it is for my good that I should walk humbly with my God. I do not know that it is for my good that my children should be about me, like olive branches round my table, but I know that it is for my good that I should flourish in the courts of my God, and that I should be the means of winning souls from going down into the pit. I am not certain that it is altogether for my good to have kind and generous friends, with whom I may hold fellowship: but I know that it is for my good that I should hold fellowship with Christ, that I should have communion with him, even though it should be in his sufferings. I know it is good for me that my faith, my love, my every grace should grow and increase, and that I should be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ my blessed Lord and Master." To the Christian, however, the highest good he can receive on earth is to grow in grace. "There!" he says, "I had rather be a bankrupt in business than I would be a bankrupt in grace; let my fortune be decreased—better that, than that I should backslide; there! let thy waves and thy

billows roll over me—better an ocean of trouble than a drop of sin; I would rather have thy rod a thousand times upon my shoulders, O my God, than I would once put out my hand to touch that which is forbidden, or allow my foot to run in the way of gainsayers." The highest good a Christian has here, is good spiritual.

All things work together for a Christian's lasting good. They all work to bring him to the Saviour's feet. "So He bringeth them to their desired haven," said the Psalmist—by storm and tempest, flood and hurricane. All the troubles of a Christian do but wash him nearer heaven; the rough winds do but hurry his passage across the straits of this life to the port of eternal peace. All things work together for the Christian's eternal and spiritual good. And yet sometimes all things work together for the Christian's temporal good. You know the story of old Jacob. "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and now ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me," said the old Patriarch. But if he could have read God's secrets, he might have found that Simeon was not lost, for he was retained as a hostage—that Joseph was not lost, but gone before to smooth the passage of his grey hairs into the grave, and that even Benjamin was to be taken away by Joseph in love to his brother. So that what seemed to be against him, even in temporal matters, was for him.

You may have heard also the story of that eminent martyr who was wont always to say, "All things work together for good." When he was seized by the officers of Queen Mary, to be taken to the stake to be burned, he was treated so roughly on the road that he broke his leg, and they jeeringly said, "All things work together for good, do they? How will your broken leg work for your good?" "I don't know," said he, "how it will, but for my good I know it will work, and you shall see it so." Strange to say, it proved true that it was for his good; for being delayed a day or so on the road through his lameness, he just arrived in London in time enough to hear that Elizabeth was proclaimed queen, and so he escaped the stake by his broken leg. He turned round upon the men who carried him, as they thought, to his death, and said to them, "Now will you believe that all things work together for good?"

Though the drift of the text was spiritual good, yet sometimes in the main current there may be carried some rich and rare temporal benefits for God's children, as well as the richer spiritual blessings.

Chapter 19: Consolation

Consolation

We sometimes speak and think very lightly of doubts and fears; but such is not Gods estimate of them. Our heavenly Father considers them to be great evils, extremely mischievous to us, and exceedingly dishonourable to Himself, for He very frequently forbids our fears, and as often affords us the most potent remedies for them. "Fear not" is a frequent utterance of the divine mouth. "I am with thee" is the fervent, soul-cheering argument to support it. Unless the Lord had judged our fears to be a great evil, He would not so often have forbidden them, or have provided such a heavenly quietus for them. Martin Luther used to say, that to comfort a desponding spirit is as difficult as to raise the dead; but, then, we have a God who both raises the dead from their graves and His people from their despair. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Saul was subject to fits of deep despondency; but when David, the skilful harper, laid his hand among the obedient strings, the evil spirit departed, overcome by the subduing power of melody. Our text is such a harp, and if the Holy Spirit will but touch its strings, its sweet discourse shall charm away the demon of despair. "I am with thee"—it is a harp of ten strings, containing the full chords of consolation. Its notes quiver to the height of ecstasy or descend to the hollow bass of the deepest grief.

More or less, all believers need consolation at all times, because their life is a very peculiar one. The walk of faith is one protracted miracle. The life, the conflict, the support, and the triumph of faith, are all far above the vision of the eye of sense. The inner life is a world of mysteries. We see nothing beneath or before us, and yet we stand upon a rock, and go from strength to strength. We march onwards unto what seems destruction, and find safety blooming beneath our feet. During our whole Christian career, the promises of God must be applied to the heart, or else, such is the weakness of flesh and blood, we are ready to go back to the flesh pots of the Egypt of carnal sense, and leave the delights which faith alone can yield us.

There are certain special occasions when the Comforter's work is needed, and one of these certainly is when we are racked with much physical pain. Many bodily pains can be borne without affecting the mind; but there are certain others whose sharp fangs insinuate themselves into the marrow of our nature, boring their way most horribly through the brain and the spirit: for these much grace is wanted. When the head is throbbing, and the heart is palpitating, and the whole system is disarranged, it is so natural to say with Jacob, "All these things are against me;" to complain of providence, and to think that we are the men above all others who have seen affliction. Then is the time for the promise to be applied with power.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee." "I will make all thy bed in thy sickness." When bodily pain gives every sign of increasing, or we expect the surgeon with his dreaded knife, then to be sustained

under sufferings at the thought of which the flesh shudders, we want the upholding gentleness of God. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee;" like the song of the nightingale, is most sweet when heard in the night season. When the trouble comes in our relative sorrows, borne personally by those dear to us; when we see them fading gradually by consumption, like lilies snapped at the stalk; or when suddenly they are swept away as fall the flowers beneath the mower's scythe; when we have to visit the grave again and again, and each time leave a part of ourselves behind us; when our garments are the ensigns of our woe, and we would fain sit down in the dust and sprinkle ashes upon our heads, because the desire of our eyes is taken from us—then we require the heavenly Comforter; then, indeed, the skilful harper is in great request, and sweet to the heart are notes like these, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God." When all the currents of providence run counter to us; when, after taking arms against a sea of trouble, we find ourselves unable to stem the boisterous torrent, and are being swept down the stream, loss succeeding loss, riches taking to themselves wings and flying away, till we see nothing before us but absolute want, and perhaps are brought actually to know what want is—then we require abundant grace to sustain our spirits. Ah! it is not so easy to come down with perfect resignation from wealth to penury, from abundance to scant; that is a philosophy to be learned only where Paul was taught it, when he said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Some would find it hard to be content in yon widow's position, with seven children, and nothing to maintain them upon but the shameful pittance which is wrung out to her for her labours with her needle, at which she sits, stitch, stitch, stitch, far into the dead of the night, stitching her very soul away. You might not find it quite so easy to bear poverty if you were shunned by men who courted you in prosperity, and who now do not know you if they meet you in the street. There are bitternesses about the poor man's lot which are not easily rinsed from his cup, and then it is that the gracious soul needs the promise, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." "Thy Maker is thine husband." A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow is God in His holy habitation. If you are brought into this condition, may my Lord and Master say to you, "It is I, be not afraid."

Dear reader, did you ever stand, as a servant of God, alone in the midst of opposition? Were you ever called to attack some deadly popular error, and, with rough bold hand, like an iconoclast, to dash down the graven images of the age? Have you heard the clamour of many, some saying this thing, and some the other—some saying, "He is a good man," but others saying, "Nay, but he deceiveth the people"? Did you ever see the rancour of the priests of Baal flashing from their faces and foaming from their mouths? Did you ever read their hard expressions, see their misrepresentations of your speech, and of your motives? and did you never feel the delight of saying, "The best of all is, that God is with us; and, in the name of God, instead of folding up the standard, we will set up our banners. If this be vile, we purpose to be viler still; and throw down the gauntlet once more in the name of the God of truth, against the error of the times"? If you have ever passed through the ordeal, then have you needed the words, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed: for I am thy God." "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" "I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee." "Fear not: for thou shalt not be ashamed."

But, my dear reader, we shall want this word of comfort most of all when we go down the shelving banks of the black river, when we hear the boomings of its waves, and feel the chill influence of its

dark flood, but cannot see to the other side; when the mists of depression of spirit hide from us "Jerusalem the Golden," and our eye catches no glimpse of the "land that floweth with milk and honey;" for the soul is occupied with present pain and wrapped in darkness which may be felt. In such a condition—

"We linger shivering on the brink, And fear to launch away."

We talk of death too lightly. It is solemn work to the best of men. It would be no child's play to an apostle to die. Yet if we can hear the whisper, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee," then the mists will sweep away from the river, and that stream, aforetime turbid, will become clear as crystal, and we shall see the "Rock of Ages" at the bottom of the flood. Then shall we descend with confidence, and hear the plash of the death stream, and think it music. Ay, and it shall be music as it melts into the songs of the seraphs, who shall accompany us through its depths. It will be delightful when those mists have rolled away, to see the shining ones coming to meet us, to go with us up the celestial hills to the pearly gate, to accompany us to the throne of God, where we shall rest for ever. Happy they who shall hear their Lord say to them, "I am with thee, be not afraid." After death, we read in this word of great events, what shall happen to us; but we feebly comprehend the revelation. After death, solemnities shall follow which may well strike a man with awe as he thinks upon them. There is a judgment and a resurrection; there is a trump which shall summon the sons of men to hear from heaven's doomsday-book their future destiny. The world shall be on fire, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; there will be a pompous appearing of the great Judge at the dread assize; there will be the winding-up of the Dispensation, and the gathering together of all things in one that are in Christ; and there will be a casting down into hell of the tares bound up in bundles to burn: and the fire that never shall be quenched will send up its smoke for ever and ever.

What about that future? Why, faith can look forward to it without a single tremor; she fears not, for she hears the voice of the everlasting God saying to her, "'I am with thee.' I will be with thee when thy dust shall rise: thy first transporting vision shall be the King in His beauty. Thou shalt be satisfied when thou shalt wake up in His likeness. I will be with thee when the heavens are on a blaze, thy preserver, thy comforter, thy heaven, thine all in all." Therefore, fear thou not, but look forward with unmoved delight to all the mystery and the glory of the age unborn.

Chapter 20: Difficulties In Front: Enemies Behind

Difficulties in Front: Enemies Behind No doubt the children of Israel supposed that now all was over; the Egyptians had sent them away, entreating them to depart, and loading them with riches. Terror had smitten the heart of Egypt, for from the king on the throne to the prisoner in the dungeon, all was dismay and fear on account of Israel. Egypt was glad for them when they departed. Therefore the children of Israel said within themselves, "We shall now march to Canaan at once; there will be no more dangers, no more troubles, no more trials; the Egyptians themselves have sent us away, and they are too much afraid of us ever to molest us again. Now shall we tread the desert through with hasty footstep; and when a few more days have passed, we shall enter into the land of our possession—the land that floweth with milk and honey." "Not quite so speedily," says God; "the time is not arrived yet for you to rest. It is true I have delivered you from Egypt; but there is much you have to learn before you will be prepared to dwell in Canaan. Therefore I shall lead you about, and instruct you, and teach you." And it came to pass that the Lord led the children of Israel about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea, till they arrived over against Baalzephon, where on either side the craggy mountains shut them in. Pharaoh hears of it; he comes upon them, to overcome them; and they stand in terrible fright and jeopardy of their lives. Now, it is usually so with the believer: he marches out of Egypt spiritually at the time of his conversion, and he says within himself, "Now I shall always be happy." He has a bright eye, and a light heart, for his fetters have been dashed to the ground, and he feels no longer the lash of conscience upon his shoulder. "Now," says he, "I may have a short life, but it will be a happy one."

"A few more rolling years at most, Will land me on fair Canaan's coast." The Israelites had a great trial sent by God Himself. There was the Red Sea in front of them. Now, it was not an enemy that put the sea there; it was God Himself. We may therefore think, that the Red Sea represents some great and trying providence, which the Lord will be sure to place in the path of every new-born child; in order to try his faith, and to test the sincerity of his trust in God.

I do not know whether your experience will back up mine: but I can say this, that the worst difficulty I ever met with, or I think I can never meet with, happened a little time after my conversion to God. And you must generally expect, very soon after you have been brought to know and love Him, that you will have some great, broad, deep Red Sea straight before your path, which you will scarcely know how to pass. Sometimes it will occur in the family. The husband says, for instance—if he is an ungodly man—"You shall not attend such-and-such a place of worship; I positively forbid you to be baptized, or to join that church;" there is a Red Sea before you. You have done nothing wrong; it is God Himself who places that Red Sea before your path. Or perhaps before that time, you were carrying on a business which now you cannot conscientiously continue; and there is a Red Sea which you have to cross in renouncing your means of livelihood. You don't see how it is to be done; how you are to maintain yourself, and to provide things honest in the sight of all men. Or perhaps your employment calls you amongst men with whom you lived before on amicable terms, and now on a sudden, they say, "Come! won't you do as you used to do?" There again is a Red

Sea before you. It is a hard struggle; you do not like to come out and say, "I cannot, I shall not, for I am a Christian." You stand still, half afraid to go forward. Or perhaps it is something proceeding more immediately from God. You find that just when He plants a vine in your heart, He blasts all the vines in your vineyard; and when He plants you in His own garden, then it is that He uproots all your comforts and your joys. Just when the Sun of Righteousness is rising upon you, your own little candle is blown out; just when you seem to need it most, your gourd is withered, your prosperity departs, and your flood becomes on ebb I say again, it may not be so with all of you, but I think that most of God's people have not long escaped the bondage of Egypt, before they find some terrible, rolling sea, lashed perhaps by tempestuous winds directly in their path; they stand aghast, and say, "O God, how can I bear this? I thought I could give up all for Thee; but now I feel as if I could do nothing! I thought I should be in heaven, and all would be easy; but here is a sea I cannot ford—there is no squadron of ships to carry me across: it is not bridged even by Thy mercy; I must swim it, or else I fear I must perish." The children of Israel would not have cared about the Red Sea a single atom, if they had not been terrified by the Egyptians who were behind them. These Egyptians, I think may be interpreted by way of parable, as the representatives of those sins which we thought were clean dead and gone. For a little while after conversion, sin does not trouble a Christian; he is very happy and cheerful, in a sense of pardon; but before many days are past, he will understand what Paul said, "I find another law in my members, so that when I would do good, evil is present with me." The first moment when he wins his liberty he laughs and leaps in an ecstasy of joy. He thinks, "Oh! I shall soon be in heaven, as for sin, I can trample that beneath my feet!" But, scarce has another Sabbath gladdened his spirit, ere he finds that sin is too much for him; the old corruptions which he fancied were laid in their graves yet a resurrection and start up afresh, and he begins to cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He sees all his old sins galloping behind him: like Pharaoh and his host pursuing him to the borders of the Red Sea. There is a great trial before him. Oh; he thinks he could bear that; he thinks he could walk through the Red Sea; but oh! those Egyptians—they are behind him! He thought he should never have seen them any more for ever; they were the plague and torment of his life when they made him work in the brick-kiln. He sees his old master, the very man who was wont to lay the lash on his shoulders, riding post haste after him; and there are the eyes of that black Pharaoh, flashing like fire in the distance; he sees the horrid scowling face of the tryant, and how he trembles! Satan is after him, and all the legions of hell seem to be let loose, if possible, utterly to destroy his soul. At such a time, moreover, our sins are more formidable to us than they were before they were forgiven; because, when we were in Egypt, we never saw the Egyptians mounted on horses, or in chariots; they only appeared as our task-masters, with their whips; but now these people see the Egyptians on horseback, clad in armour; they behold all the mighty men of valour come out with their warlike instruments to slay them. But these poor children of Israel had such faint hearts. They no sooner saw the Egyptians than they began to cry out; and when they beheld the Red Sea before them, they murmured against their deliverer. A faint heart is the worst foe a Christian can have; whilst he keeps his faith firm, whilst the anchor is fixed deep in the rock, he never need fear the storm; but when the hand of faith is palsied, or the eye of faith is dim, it will go hard with us. As for the Egyptian, he may throw his spear; while we can catch it in our shield of faith, we are not terrified by the weapon, but if we lose our faith, the spear becomes a deadly dart. While we have faith, the Red Sea may flow before us, as deep and as dark as it pleases: for like Leviathan, we trust we can snuff up Jordan at a draught. But if we have no faith,

then at the most insignificant streamlet, which Faith could take up in her hands in a single moment, and drink like Gideon's men, poor Unbelief stands quivering and crying, "Ah! I shall be drowned in the floods, or I shall be slain by the foe; there is no hope for me; I am driven to despair. It would have been better for me that I had died in Egypt, than that I should come hither to be slain by the hand of the enemy." The child of God when he is first born, has but very little faith, because he has had but little experience; he has not tried the promise, and therefore he does not know its faithfulness. He has not used the arm of faith, and therefore the sinews of it have not become strong. Let him live a little longer, and become confirmed in the faith, and he will not care for Red Seas, nor yet for the Egyptians; but just then his little heart beats against the walls of his body, and he laments, "Ah, me! ah, me! O wretched man that I am! How shall I ever find deliverance?"

Cheer up, then, heir of grace! What is thy trial? Has providence brought it upon thee? If so, unerring wisdom will deliver thee from it. What is it thou art now exercised upon? As truly as thou art alive, God will remove it. Dost thou think God's cloudy pillar would ever lead thee to a place where God's right arm would fail thee? Dost thou imagine that He would ever guide thee into such a defile that He could not conduct thee out again? The providence which apparently misleads, will in verity befriend thee. That which leads thee into difficulties guards thee against thy foes; it casts darkness on thy sins, whilst it giveth light to thee. How sweet is providence to a child of God, when he can reflect upon it! He can look out into this world, and say, "However great my troubles, they are not so great as my Father's power; however difficult may be my circumstances, yet all things around me are working together for good. He who holds up yon unpillared arch of the starry heavens can also support my soul without a single apparent prop; He who guides the stars in their well-ordered courses, even when they seem to move in mazy dances, surely He can overrule my trials in such a way that out of confusion He will bring order; and from seeming evil produce lasting good. He who bridles the storm, and puts the bit in the mouth of the tempest, surely He can restrain my trial, and keep my sorrows in subjection. I need not fear while the lightnings are in His hands, and the thunders sleep within His lips; while the oceans gurgle from His fist, and the clouds are in the hollow of His hands; while the rivers are turned by His foot, and while He diggeth the channels of the sea. Surely He whose might wings an angel, can furnish a worm with strength; He who guides a cherub will not be overcome by the trials of an emmet like myself. He who makes the most ponderous orb roll in dignity, and keeps its predestined orbit, can make a little atom like myself move in my proper course, and conduct me as He pleaseth. Christian! there is no sweeter pillow than providence; and when providence seemeth adverse, believe it still, lay it under thy head, for depend upon it there is comfort in its bosom. There is hope for thee, thou child of God! That great trouble which is to come in thy way in the early part of thy pilgrimage, is planned by love, the same love which shall interpose as thy protector. The children of Israel had another refuge; they knew that they were the covenant people of God, and that, though they were in difficulties, God had brought them there, and therefore God (with reverence let me say it) was bound in honour to bring them out of that trouble into which He had brought them. "Well," says the child of God, "I know I am in a strait, but this is one thing also I know, that I did not come out of Egypt by myself—I know that He brought me out; I know that I did not escape by my own power, or slay my firstborn sins myself—I know that He did it; and though I fled from the tyrant—I know that He made my feet mighty for travel, for there was not one feeble in all our tribes; I know that though I am at the Red Sea, I did not run there uncalled, but He bade me go there, and therefore I give to the winds my fears; for if He hath led me here into this difficulty, He will lead me out, and lead me

through. The third refuge which the children of Israel had, was in a man; and neither of the two others, without that, would have been of any avail. It was the man Moses. He did everything for them. Thy greatest refuge, O child of God! in all thy trials, is in a Man: not in Moses, but in Jesus; not in the servant, but in the Master. He is interceding for thee, unseen and unheard by thee, even as Moses did for the children of Israel. If thou couldst but, in the dim distance, catch the sweet syllables of His voice as they distil from His lips, and see His heart as it speaks for thee, thou wouldst take comfort; for God hears that Man when He pleads. He can overcome every difficulty. He has not a rod, but a cross, which can divide the Red Sea; He has not only a cloudy pillar of forgiving grace, which can dim the eyes of your foes and can keep them at a distance; but He has a cross, which can open the Red Sea and drown thy sins in the very midst. He will not leave thee. Look! on yonder rock of heaven He stands, cross in hand, even as Moses with his rod. Cry to Him, for with that uplifted cross He will cleave a path for thee, and guide thee through the sea; He will make those hoary floods, which had been friends for ever, stand asunder like foes. Call to Him, and He will make thee a way in the midst of the ocean, and a path through the pathless sea. Cry to Him, and there shall not a sin of thine be left alive; He will sweep them all away; and the king of sin, the devil, he too shall be overwhelmed beneath the Saviour's blood, whilst thou shalt sing—

"Hell and my sins obstruct my path, But hell and sin are conquered foes; My Jesus nailed them to His cross, And sang the triumph as He rose."

Chapter 21: A Harp's Sweet Notes

A Harp's Sweet Notes This harp sounds most sweetly. All through life, I may picture the saints as marching to its music, even as the children of Israel set forward to the notes of the silver trumpets. Israel came to the Red Sea; they might well be afraid, for the Egyptians were behind them—the crack of their whips might be heard; the rolling sea was before them, but Israel marched confidently through its depths, because the word was given, "Fear not; Jehovah is with His people." See the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, how safely do they follow its direction, even through the heart of the sea! They tread the sand on the other side: it is an arid waste—how shall they support themselves or their flocks? "Fear thou not; for I am with thee!" Lo! the manna drops from heaven, and the waters ripple from the rock. But see! they come to Jordan! it is their last difficulty, and then they shall reach the land of their inheritance. Jordan divides—what aileth thee, O Jordan, that thou wast driven back? God was with His people—they feared not, but entered into their rest: this is the heritage of all the saints. As I thought of the life of faith, I saw before mine eyes, as in a vision, a lofty staircase of light, and, led by an invisible hand, I mounted step by step; when I had ascended long and far, it turned and turned again and again, I could see no supports to this elevated staircase, no pillars of iron, no props of stone—it seemed to hang in air. As I climbed, I looked up to see whither the staircase went, but I saw no further than the step whereon I stood; save that now and then the clouds of light above me parted asunder, and I thought I saw the throne of the Eternal and the heaven of His glory. My next step seemed to be upon the air, and yet when I boldly put down my foot I found it firm as adamant beneath me. I looked back on the steps which I had trodden, and was amazed, but I dared not tarry, for "forward" was the voice which urged me on, and I knew, for faith had told me, that that winding stair would end at last, beyond the sun and moon and stars, in the excellent glory. As now and then I gazed down into the depths out of which the stair had lifted me, I shuddered at my fate should I slip from my standing, or should the next step plunge me into the abyss! Over the edge of that whereon I stood, I gazed with awe, for I saw nothing but a gaping void of black darkness, and into this I must plunge my foot in the faith of finding another step beneath it. I should have been unable to advance, and would have sat down in utter despair had I not heard the word from above of one in whom I trusted, saying, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." I knew that my mysterious guide could not err. I felt that infinite faithfulness would not bid me take a step if it were not safe; and therefore mounting still, I stand at this hour happy and rejoicing, though my faith be all above my own comprehension, and my work above my own ability.

We believe in the providence of God, but we do not believe half enough in it. Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere, set in their places at every point of the road. In the old days of the post horses, there were always relays of swift horses ready to carry onward the king's mails. It is wonderful how God has His relays of providential agents; how when He has done with one, there is always another just ready to take his place. Sometimes you have found one friend fail you—he is just dead and buried; "Ah!" say you, "what shall I do?" Well, well, God knows how to carry on the purposes of His providence; He will raise up another. How strikingly punctual

providence is! You and I make appointments, and miss them by half-an-hour; but God never missed an appointment yet. God never is before His time, though we often wish He were; but He never is behind, no, not by one tick of the clock. When the children of Israel were to go down out of Egypt, all the Pharaohs in the pyramids, if they had risen to life again, could not have kept them in bondage another half-minute. "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go!" it was time, and go they must. All the kings of the earth, and all the princes thereof, are in subjection to the kingdom of God's providence, and He can move them just as He pleases; and as the showman pulls his string and moves his puppets, so can God move all that are on earth, and the angels in heaven, according to His will and pleasure. And now, trembler, wherefore are you afraid? "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." All the mysterious arrangements of providence work for our good. Touch that string again, you who are in trouble, and see if there my harp be not a rare instrument.

God well knows how, if He do not interpose openly to deliver us in trouble, to infuse strength into our sinking hearts. "There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him," it is said of our Lord; and I do not doubt but what invisible spirits are often sent by God from heaven to invigorate our spirits when they are ready to sink. Have you never felt it? You sat down an hour ago and wept as if your heart would break, and then you bowed your knee in solemn prayer and spread the case before the Lord, and afterwards when you came down from the chamber, you felt as if you could joyfully encounter the trouble; you were humbled and bowed down under it, as a child under a chastening rod, but you gave yourself up to it. You knew it was your Father that smote, and so you did not rebel any longer, but you went into the world determined to meet the difficulty which you thought would crush you, feeling that you were quite able to sustain it.

I have read of those who bathe in those baths of Germany which are much impregnated with iron, that they have felt, after bathing, as if they were made of iron, and were able in the heat of the sun to cast off the heat as though they were dressed in steel. Happy indeed are they who bathe in the bath of such a promise as this, "I am with thee!" Put your whole soul into that consoling element; plunge into it, and you will feel your strength suddenly renewed, so that you can bear troubles which before would have overburdened you.

And, there is a way by which the Lord can be with His people, which is best of all, namely, by sensible manifestations of His presence, imparting joy and peace which surpass all understanding. I shall not venture to explain the exhilaration, the rapture, which is caused in a child of God by the consciousness that God is near him. In one sense, He is always near us; but there is an opening of our eye, and an unsealing of our ear, a putting away of the external senses and an opening of the inner spiritual sense, by which the inner life of the Christian becomes wondrously conscious of the pervading presence of the Most High. Describe it, I cannot; it is not a thing for words; it is like what heaven must be; it is a stray gleam of the sunlight of paradise, fallen upon this sinful world. You are as sure that God is with you, as you are sure that you are in the body. Though the walls do not glow, and though the humble floor does not blaze with light, and though no rustle of angels' wings be heard, yet you are like Moses when he put off his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon you stand has become holy ground to you. Bowed down, I have felt it, until it seemed as if the spirit must be crushed; yet at the same time, lifted up till the exceeding weight of glory became too great a joy, too overwhelming for flesh and blood.

Here is a person who has lost all his goods, and is very poor. He is met to-morrow morning by a generous friend who says to him, "Fear not, you shall go share and share with me. You know that I am a person of considerable property; fear not, I know your losses, but I am with you." Now, I feel sure that any person so accosted, would go home and say to himself, "Well, now, I have no need of any trouble, I am rich, since one half of what my friend has is more than I had before." Ay, but may not the same losses which fell upon you fall upon your friend? May not the same reverses in commerce which have made you poor, make him poor? and in that case you are as ill off as ever. Besides, your friend may change his mind; he may find you much too expensive a client, and he may one of these days shut his door against you. But, now, God says to you, "I am with thee." Now, the Lord has much more than your friend; He is much more faithful; He will never grow weary of you; He cannot change His mind. Surely it is better for you to feel that God is with you than to rely upon an arm of flesh. Is it not so? Believer, you will never prefer man to God, will you? Will you prefer to rest in a poor, changeable man's promise, rather than to rest upon the immutable covenant of God? You would not dare to say that, though I dare say you have acted as if you would. I am afraid, such is our unbelief, that sometimes we should really prefer the poor arm of flesh to the Almighty arm of God—what a disgrace to us! But in our sober senses, we must confess that God's "I am with thee," is better than the kindest assurance of the best of friends. One may be engaged in Christian service, and have been working hard; would not you feel very happy if God were to raise up a dozen young spirits who would rally round and help? "Oh!" say you, "yes, I could go then to my grave saying, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,' since there are so many others enlisted in the good cause." Well, but is it so? Might they not also grow as weary as yourself? and what are they compared with the world's needs? and may they not soon be taken away, or prove unfaithful? If God saith, "I am with thee," is not that better than twenty thousand of the brightest spirits; ay, and thousands and thousands of the most industrious missionaries? For what would they all be without God? So that the only comfort they can bring you, they have to borrow first of all from Him.

Take the naked promise of God, for it is enough, and more than enough, though all earth's springs were dry.

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