

approaching death—a service altogether instructive; equally awakening and consolatory; adapted most admirably both to fix the soul of the sufferer where alone hope is to be found; and to aid in his high and holy office the servant of the Lord, who is called to minister. When that service is engaged in with a true spirit of devotion, how entirely is all self-righteousness put aside; all insincerity abashed; all vain terror overcome! The humble rejoice to find themselves encouraged; the faithful strengthened; the wavering brought back to the truth—whilst despondence is cheered, hope is duly regulated; nor was ever found, I should think, a heart so hard as to read or to hear it unmoved<sup>1</sup>. Throughout this service for the sick, from its opening to its close, there is a watchful care so to lead your thoughts to God, that neither consciousness of sin and infirmity sink you to despair, nor faith in the promises of redemption lead you to presumption. The truth, that God chastening you as a father, is by those very means at once proving his love and intending your welfare—appears, with a beautiful consistency, pervading every part. You pray that your conviction of this truth may be sanctified to you, leading you “to take in good part the chastisement of the Lord.” As you approach nearer to judgment, it is possible that some fear yet remains, lest when there shall be arrayed against you sins, negligences, and ignorances, among them may be found not only those with which your own memory is burdened, but those also which *you* may have *forgotten*; yet which God forgets not till washed out in the blood of the Lamb. You therefore implore your gracious Lord “to *remember not* your iniquities,” but to “spare you whom he hath redeemed with his most precious blood.” O the power of that plea! It can still those terrors which trouble even the contrite heart, when contemplating the perfection of Him, before whom the

<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention, in the present work, to enter into a general explanation of this service: yet I cannot forbear thus directing the sick to its ready aid.

freed spirit must appear. We ask, "How can such a Being forget?" True it is, that as *we* forget, He forgets *not*. Happily for us, *his* forgetfulness is but another term for his forgiveness; and his forgiveness, when vouchsafed, partakes of his perfections. It is complete. Our offences once forgiven by Him, are, as to their dreadful consequences, as though they had never been. So true is the Apostle's bold assertion, that "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"—a boldness well borne out by the solemn declaration of a reconciled God to his repentant people, that their "sins and their iniquities He will remember no more<sup>1</sup>." The stain of them is washed away by the atoning blood of the Lamb. "*His* blood cleanseth from *all* sin!" for He offered upon the cross "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world<sup>2</sup>." Your faith firmly fixed upon this blessed truth, and seeing that thereby the perfection of Divine justice is satisfied—for "mercy and truth can now meet together<sup>3</sup>"—nature yields to grace; the fear which nature dictates is overcome by the hope to which grace leads you. How is there room for fear, when such a Being is at hand to save you—when your Redeemer is your God?

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH IN LIFE'S LAST HOURS.

THUS you "commune with your heart" in the awful stillness of life's closing scene; and, as each moment passeth away, your communing brings you nearer and

<sup>1</sup> Jer. lxxxix. 34. Heb. viii. 12. Isa. xliii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> See the Communion Service.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxxv. 10.

nearer to that glorious Being, who, having conducted you at last beside the waters of comfort even in this wilderness of life, forsakes you not as you enter the gloomy vale to which it leads, even "the valley of the shadow of death." Dreading it as you did in prospect, you dread it not now! for *He* is with you, your Strength, your Guide, your Comforter: you "fear no evil: his rod and his staff comfort you<sup>1</sup>."

But perhaps, even when your repentance is sincere, your faith firm, and your hope bright with respect to the gracious acceptance of the soul by a merciful God, the heart still dwells with anxious care upon survivors—upon those from whom you are about to part, and whom you are leaving to the cares and troubles of a stormy world. You are a parent. Your eye rests upon the loved children weeping round you. They already begin to feel the desolateness which soon will overcloud them, when your affectionate voice shall no longer be heard to counsel them in their doubts, encourage them in their duties, cheer them in their sorrows, and direct them into the path of safety and of comfort. No word may pass; but you read their thoughts; and you, for whom they weep, are yourself the soother of their grief. Faith wins for herself a triumph here also. You fear not. You remind them of the gracious promises of an all-present and all-powerful God, that He will supply to them their every want; will be Himself in the place of the departed—a "Father of the fatherless, who defendeth the cause of the widows, even God in his holy habitation<sup>2</sup>." You remind them of his gracious goodness to you hitherto, through a long and varied life; you recount his many merciful providences towards you, and your numerous deliverances from impending danger or trouble; you gratefully acknowledge his long-suffering towards you, in giving you added years to prepare for eternity: you cannot doubt his goodness now! You now too

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxiii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 5.

reap the reward of that Christian spirit which in life you delighted to exercise towards your fellow-creatures. You give assurance to those around you, for their guidance and instruction, that peace is in your heart; for you find there no revenge, no ill will, no painful recollection even of those evils which malice once worked against you; you have as fully forgiven all, as you hope for Christ's sake to be yourself forgiven<sup>1</sup>;—no burden of enmity presses upon your soul. Rejoicing to feel that “God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,” you see with a clearness, which no worldly cloud now dims, the justness of the Apostle's reasoning—“How shall God not with him also freely give us all things<sup>2</sup>?” Thus whilst you speak comfort to the mourning survivors, by showing that your faith is upon the Rock, and that your hope maketh not ashamed, you endeavour to point these truths for their practical instruction, that when *they* come to the same awful hour, they too “may find peace in the day of their visitation.” You urge them to live above the world; no longer enchanted by its smiles; no longer terrified by its frowns; no longer conformed to its spirit, but “transformed by the renewing of their mind<sup>3</sup>;” that so to them, as to you, a death-bed may be in peace. True! the pains and terrors of death, though sometimes they are mitigated, and the soul appears to pass away as in soft slumber, are yet often grievous to be borne; and the sorrowing hearts around you dread lest you suffer under them. Then it is that Faith enables you to nerve their courage by your own firm reliance on a “very present God<sup>4</sup>.” As you approach nearer to the glorious Majesty of heaven, so entirely are you convinced of your own utter unworthiness in his sight, that you confess of these pains, even when they rack you with agony, that they are but the natural penalty of a sin-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 147—on the Lord's Prayer.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. xlv. 1.

ful and corrupt nature ; too fully deserved by yourself, and too justly inflicted by a holy God<sup>1</sup>. You compare your sufferings with those of your blessed Redeemer—and the language of the penitent on the cross is the language of your heart—“*We indeed justly ; but this man hath done nothing amiss :*” yet no sorrow was like unto his sorrow. Severe, too, and just as these pains may be, they will soon cease ; and *then* you will be admitted to their Father and your Father, to their God and your God—happier even than their ardent love can wish you—no care, no sorrow, no pain. They weep ; you weep not. You are yourself in proof, that whatever be the nature of the trials to which we may be called, whether in life or in death, “*as our days, so shall be our strength*<sup>2</sup>.” From the hour that sickness first crept upon you, to the present moment, when it is subduing your vital powers, and racking you with pain, you have had grace to be more and more submissive, more and more patient and resigned ; your faith has been the more strengthened, your hope more brightened ; and whilst your throbbing pulses tell how fast the tide of life is ebbing, you exhibit—*not* the stubborn pride of stoic apathy either to the pangs of death, which may soon come upon you, or to the grief of those who mourn you : *not* the daring of an assumed resolution—you exhibit the calm and steady fortitude which the Spirit of Christ alone can give ; enabling you, in humble imitation of your agonized Redeemer, to cast your burden upon your God, and

<sup>1</sup> Death itself came by that judicial and righteous connexion which is between sin and dissolution : for how could a body defiled by sin be fit to accompany the soul to its destined immortality of bliss in heaven ? Needs be, that it underwent such change as Almighty Wisdom appointed it to undergo by death, that it might afterwards be created anew, “*like unto Christ’s glorious body.*”

The body of Jesus Christ, though it was for a time forsaken of its spirit, knew *no corruption, because it had known no sin.*

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 25. See p. 76.

submit the issue to Him. You are on your way to another and a better world;—deep and powerful indeed are the feelings which thus fill your soul; they are feelings which no wild fancy dictates; no vain imagination creates; they spring of “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of him crucified.” *He* is “thy plagues, O Death—and thy destruction, O Grave<sup>1</sup>!”—they are feelings which the agonies of dissolution cannot weaken; they are strong as the rock on which they rest; they sustain your faith, and elevate your hope, and prepare your soul for heaven!

At length, though consciousness fails not, you are powerless to give expression to it. The sight dims, the hearing fails, the tongue refuses its office—you are left in the solemn stillness of “the valley of the shadow of death.” Your spirit hovering between the two worlds, prepares for its entrance upon that eternal state of which you have thought so much and so often, on the brink of which you now find yourself, and of which soon you will know all the wonders. With what awe do you walk in the seclusion, and gloom, and silence, of that dark and solitary region! True, for others the light of day may be shining in full splendour, but your eye is closed to its cheering ray; the voice of love and affection may speak sweet words of soothing to you; but, though never before was affection so deep, never before was love so strong, your ear catcheth no sound; your eye maketh no recognition. All those who would fain thus minister to you in life’s last hour, you are about to leave for ever here. Yet you cannot sorrow for them. You have already, in faith, committed them to the care of One, whose care for their best interests is only equalled by his love and his power; and *they* are *infinite*<sup>2</sup>. Nei-

<sup>1</sup> Hos. xiii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> In the history of our blessed Lord’s life, we find Him on various occasions directing us to follow his example. When, for instance, He would enforce the practice of humility in the exercise of good offices

ther can you sorrow for yourself. This loneliness, awful though it be, is but for a moment. You will

towards our fellow-creatures, He Himself washed his disciples' feet, and pointed to his own act, both as a type of his power and will to cleanse the soul, by washing it in the living waters, of which He is Himself the heavenly fountain; and likewise as an illustration of that principle of humility which should ever guide, in their conduct towards each other, the disciples of a meek and lowly Master. But that history has recorded other passages in his short sojourn here below, which, though not directly pointed for our imitation, both challenge imitation as a duty, and permit it as a privilege. Thus, when He was about to yield up his life upon the cross, He bequeathed to his beloved friend, St. John, the care of his sorrowing mother, who was soon to be left unprotected—exposed alone to the hard trials of a cruel world. The whole scene, as depicted by the Evangelist, is of deep and affecting interest. We behold the mother, standing in loneliness of heart, and with an intenseness of feeling which mothers only can understand, viewing her wondrous Son in his agony, and watching his death in all the touching silence of utter hopelessness; whilst the agonized Jesus turns upon her his last look of mingled pity and affection, with the simple and emphatic charge, severally to her and to his friend—"Behold thy son!—Behold thy mother!" True, the Saviour added no command that we should "go and do likewise:" yet the instruction is not less plain. See we not that He has for ever sanctified the tenderest feeling of which the human heart is capable—I had almost said its last weakness—in the thoughtful care for the temporal welfare of survivors. Can that cease to be a duty in us, which He practised? Or can that care be in us unhallowed, for the exercise of which we can plead his own affecting example? O how good, how gracious, how tenderly considerate for our weaknesses! What a glorious proof that He was indeed Himself "touched with all the feeling of our infirmity except sin!" Behold Him offering up Himself on the cross, the world's great sacrifice; bearing the weight of the sins of mankind; in all the desolateness of desertion by his God, yet not holding his work finished, till He had provided for the welfare of his heart-broken mother! He saw the "sword of misery pierce her heart," and He forgot his own woes in hers. As often then as we contemplate this scene, it is impossible not to feel the holiest gratitude at the assurance thus afforded to the Christian's mind, that even in the awful hour of dissolution, there may be mingled with care for our soul's welfare, care also for the welfare of those dear ones we are about to leave, and thus the parting of the living from the dead, sad and heart-racking as is the severing, finds some soothing even here.

The occasion thus referred to presents one of the clearest and most impressive explanations which the inquiring mind can wish, of those precepts of our blessed Lord, with respect to worldly carefulness, which are too often, if not wilfully misunderstood, erroneously applied. For instance, we hear his startling warnings—"take *no thought* for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the

change the sympathy of earthly friends for the love of your God, and the ministry of his angels, and the society of the blessed. God will not fail his word. He will be with you on your way. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee<sup>1</sup>." Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or can faith be so weak as not to trust Him in this the last great trial of the soul? He who hath sustained thee in the temptations of life—shall He not be thy rod and thy staff in the trials of death? Or, is his hand shortened, that He cannot save his Israel now?—Rather shall ample evidence of his presence be yours,

things of itself\*." "If any man come to me, and *hate not* his father, and *mother*, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple †." Are we, therefore, to disregard the duties of the world, and outrage all the sweet charities of life? Look to the cross, and the Saviour there expiring! The same Being, who, when surrounded by those who made the world their idol, and heeded not the "one thing needful," warned with all the energy of a Divine love the souls of those careless ones, did, in his own death-hour, make wise and thoughtful provision for the morrow; and the same voice which declares the condition of our discipleship to be, that we hate those to whom nature herself hath bound us in bonds of affection, rallies its fainting powers in death, to enforce upon a sorrowing friend the care and guardianship of a surviving *mother*. With how marvellous—rather with how Divine,—a wisdom, anticipating every difficulty which our infirmities might present to a right understanding of his words, does the example of our Redeemer qualify and regulate his precepts! None but the proud of heart and of will need misunderstand his words. His precepts are strongly marked indeed; stamped with that decision which is characteristic of earnest affection and sure wisdom; but it is clear that they are directed against *excess*. Care for the body, so long as God pleases to prolong our existence in this lower state of being, is a duty; but if that care be taken in a presumptuous disregard of a superintending Providence; or, if it exceed—I should rather say—if it be not inferior to the care which we take for our soul's welfare, then are we careful overmuch: then are we taking "thought for the morrow," to the dishonour of our God, and the ruin of our souls. But a due and proper regard of our own well-being in life, and that of our survivors in death, is now for ever sanctified by the example of our Saviour Christ: only let us take good heed to be "likeminded" after his example ‡.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xliii. 2.

\* Matt. vi. 25.

† Luke xiv. 26.

‡ Rom. xv. 5.



in a holy calm, which none but He can give; in a firm unshaken faith, which his Spirit alone can supply; and in a hope so holy and so bright, that as it emanates from heaven, so will it be an earnest of that heaven for you. Who knoweth but that when thy soul, thus plumed for flight, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, free to expatiate on the expanse before it, spreads its wings for flight, angels may be at hand, ministering to thee as to the patient Lazarus, sustaining thee in thy flight, and bearing thee in safety and in peace to thy rest in heaven?

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

OF those who read these pages, some there may be, who, though each cherishes in his heart the fond desire that he may “die the death of the righteous,” yet being strong, and healthful, and prosperous, are reluctant to think upon death—itself a withering blight to all man’s hopes of ease and advancement in this world, and a barrier for ever to those fair scenes which prosperity may be opening to him. Much might be said for this reluctance, either if it were not appointed unto all men once to die, or if forgetfulness of that truth could confer any chartered privilege to keep death in check till man should proclaim himself ready for the meeting; or even if the contemplation of our end necessarily sunk the heart in sadness. But, as Death *must* be met, though the time of the meeting is shadowed in the awful gloom of uncertainty; as it oftentimes seizes the rich in their prosperity, cuts off youth in its bloom, and subdues manhood in its strength; whilst age, and poverty, and sickness, are spared still to linger out their existence of

weakness, misery, and pain; and as there can be no real enjoyment in this world, unless our peace be sealed for the next; wisdom tells us, that to *prepare* for Death—"man's last enemy"<sup>1</sup>—is by God's blessing the readiest way to gather courage for the meeting, and strength for the struggle. Hence to the strong and healthful, as to the sick and dying, speaks the voice which came down from heaven—"Watch!" But since it is difficult, in the hurry and bustle of life, to be free for such thoughts as befit our watchfulness, it were not less wise than profitable to begin the duty in the sad stillness of the chamber of death.

Come, then, let us enter that still and solemn chamber; contemplate the stern conquest which, for a season, death hath there achieved; and in the salutary pause so given to earthly views, bear our thoughts to that future world, which the dead have entered, and towards which we are ourselves hastening. The scene, how strange—how awful! There lieth one, in whom lately moved the springs of life in full activity, giving animation to every the minutest portion of the frame. Now all is motionless. The shadow of death hath passed over those features, of late instinct with every varied expression which might indicate intelligence; and marble itself is not more rigid than those once plastic lineaments. The eye is closed, yet the dark brow evidences that no easy struggle was that which the mortal frame endured, ere it gave up the dread contest with this champion of the grave. It were not possible to contemplate such a scene unmoved. With a silent, but impressive eloquence, not only does it warn the sinner, startle the careless, and rouse the lukewarm, but it encourages the righteous, and admonishes all.

What change is here wrought? Was the dead exalted in station, and commanding in wealth? Was he one whom during life the world saw high in honour

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 26.

and in fame; the admiration of the wise, and the envy of all? Where now the dazzling splendour of his course? All is faded in the gloom of death. Nothing profits now but the use he may have made of worldly advantages, to promote the glory of God and the welfare of mankind. If his wisdom and his might, his riches and his influence, rich gifts from heaven<sup>1</sup>, were applied to uphold true religion and virtue; if all things were done, "not as unto men, but as unto God;" if an uniform sense of responsibility to a heavenly tribunal was the paramount feeling of his heart—determining his motives, and regulating his counsels, and directing his actions; if, amid the allurements of this world, his affections were set on another; if, happily an instrument of good to his fellow-creatures, he yet referred the power and the glory to God; if, living unto the Lord, he also died in the Lord—*then* "his works do follow him<sup>2</sup>;" and he will be recompensed, not indeed of merit, but of grace, through the satisfaction made by our Redeemer, Christ; and his course, like the ship's bright track on the dark waters, will still serve to guide into the same blessed path others who are "passing the waves of this troublesome world," and, like him, steering for the haven of their rest. To the righteous, then, his example speaks encouragement. Are you haply of those servants who delight to do their Master's will? Are you of exalted station, ample wealth, and far-spread influence; yet self-denying towards your God<sup>3</sup>, benevolent towards your fellow-creatures, and of a humble heart? Though favoured of this present world, is your mind set on that future world awaiting you? Do you strive so to use your earthly blessings, that they may turn to heavenly blessings? so to use each passing hour, that your last hour may be peace? To you the example of the righteous dead is a continual encouragement "not to be weary in well-doing," but to remember

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xxix. 12.<sup>2</sup> Rev. xiv. 13.<sup>3</sup> Matt. xvi. 24.

that "you shall reap, if you faint not." Nay, they well remind you, that there *is* a spirit of ambition, which even in this world is an object worthy the aim of the noblest minds—the ambition of living to the honour of our God, the benefit of our fellow-creatures, and the good of our immortal souls. Death destroys not that ambition—it but suspends its agency. *That* spirit will resume its power over us in higher worlds, where the glory of the Lord will be our aim, and to serve and to please Him be our ambition for ever. To those, however, who, in a spirit of pride and vain-glory, live the slaves of wealth, or of worldly ambition, making self their idol, and holding this world to be their resting-place, what an instructive lesson is here presented! The world has no monitor like the grave. The dead thence speak the language of no earthly wisdom. They not only tell that "all is vanity," they are themselves in proof that the voice is truth. They warn the ambitious, that if the wealth, the station, the power, the influence, at which they aim, be at last made their own, all will soon fade, even as his over whose lifeless form they now stand: soon they will have left their riches for others; and as they brought nothing into this world, neither may they carry any thing out. Reader! wisely examine well your own heart. Has worldly ambition ever agitated you? has it ever wrapt you in dreamy visions of greatness and applause, of riches and of power? Have you, when under this delusion, been tempted to forego your rectitude, in the pursuit of that to which the spirit of ambition points? Behold and see that even the highest earthly honours must end in dust: all is indeed vanity. Even as you view your fellow-creature now, cold and powerless in the awful repose of death, others will one day behold you. Neither can your pomp follow you; and however in life you may have been exalted far above others in wealth, fame, or station, you must with them return unto the dust whence you were taken. Meditate upon this scene

with the solemn feelings which it demands. It may well calm all the agitating hopes and fears of those whose aim reaches no higher than this present world of vanity and woe.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### CONSCIENCE AROUSED.

THUS far the death-scene is encouraging and instructive. There are those to whom it is more. There are those whose consciences, long dormant, it at length awakens, and to whom it renews the memory of events long forgotten, but now remembered—remembered with horror ill concealed, and remorse unavailing. These are they, who in life first envied their neighbour, then hated, and at length persecuted him. “Where *now* is the fury of the oppressors?” By a just retribution it is now in their own hearts: thither the arrow, aimed too well at another, has at last returned. Victims of self-reproach, they now in their agony envy the dead, not as of late, his wisdom, power, riches, or other worldly advantages—they envy him the calm and peaceful silence of the grave. If you injure your neighbour whilst he lives, no sooner do compunctious visitations begin to torment your conscience, and better thoughts are yielded to, than you may seek him, and recompense him, and be reconciled to him<sup>1</sup>. Have you slandered his fair fame? By a frank avowal of your sin, and a candid expression of sorrow for it, you may in some degree, so heal the wound you have made, that the past will be forgiven, and you will “gain a brother.” If you have aimed at his peace of mind, by the shafts of wit and ridicule—nay, if you have, in the coward spirit of

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 24.

wickedness, covertly endeavoured to undermine his comfort by *secret* attacks, in which you professed no participation, though you rejoiced in the pain you caused; if you have mocked and scoffed the virtues which you would not imitate; if, because you felt his very excellence to be a tacit reproach upon your own worldliness, you therefore hated whom thus you envied—still, so long as life is spared, it is not impossible but that you may relent, and offend no more; and that he who was so long an object of your injustice and wrong, may, with that truly noble spirit which is ever attendant upon the virtuous, be as placable as you are relenting. But when he, whom you have thus injured in thought, and word, and deed, lies dead before you—*he*, free for ever from your cruelty; *you*, left with the burden upon your soul of injuries freshly remembered, but beyond recall or recompense—calumny, hatred, scorn; offences indeed against your neighbour, but to be answered for before your God—can imagination picture to itself a state of mind on this side the grave more utterly wretched? Death has rolled back the tide of human passions, and the heart, like a forsaken shore, lies exposed to itself, with all its long-concealed realities; laid bare in all the unsightly variety of a selfish pride, a deluding envy, and a harsh uncharitableness, which the towering wave once covered. Then it is, that the soul, conscience-stricken at the recollection of sins long forgotten, receives with amazement and dread the solemn truth, that “for all these things, God will call us to judgment<sup>1</sup>.” So appalling is the feeling which

<sup>1</sup> It is a wise as well as a Christian habit, to encourage ourselves to think kindly towards those among whom we live, lest in death we lament opportunities of kindness for ever lost, and regret occasions of harshness then past recall. It may indeed sometimes happen that in pursuing a course so opposed to our natural feelings, we are called to exercise no small share of self-denial and self-control. But how far better to bear the weight of self-denial, and to submit to the curb of self-control in life, than risk the misery of remorse in death! David's example is in clear and in beautiful illustration of this reasoning, which

thus arises from the consciousness of having injured another, when we view the dead, unoffending now, though long injured—*all opportunity of repairing the injury for ever cut off*—that part of the misery of those dread offenders against the majesty of the Most High, who once cried “Crucify him, crucify him!” and of those who in succeeding ages, by their desperate and presumptuous sins, *have crucified Him, and do crucify Him afresh*—part of the misery, under which they severally shall suffer at the last great day, will be the *view* of Him whom they persecuted—“they shall *look on him* whom they pierced”—*that* sight aggravating even the gnawing of “the worm that never dieth,” and the torment of “the fire which never can be quenched.”

It is when under solemn feelings like these—feelings quickened and cleared to the truth by the scene which calls them forth—that we are fully aware of our real position, as responsible to our Maker for a kindly or a cruel bearing towards our fellow-creatures. Blessed, if the subdued heart even then bends itself to the tardy confession—“I have sinned. God be merciful to me a sinner! I know and feel my sin. I

he felt in all its force, and acted upon with a decision and perseverance well worthy our imitation: “My soul hath long dwelt among them that are enemies unto peace.” But what course did he adopt? Mark his resolve: “*I labour for peace* \*.” This is a course not less wise than holy. It is in evidence of that true wisdom which prefers duty to inclination, and the future to the present. Nor let any delude themselves by supposing that injuries of harshness, which they may have forgotten now, they will always forget. Even in our daily experience, circumstances for long years totally forgotten, are, by the occurrence of some or other event associated with them, brought to light with all their vividness of joy or sorrow, regret or happiness. Who then shall say, how much of the past now forgotten, may at the close of life rush again to memory, compressed into a moment—that moment, the moment which precedes our entrance upon eternity? Thou little drest now, perhaps, what hidden cells of memory may then be opened.—*Watch now!*

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\* Ps. cxx. 5.

feel that if to love the Lord our God be the first commandment, the second, though demanding only that we love our neighbours as ourselves, is *like unto it* : like unto it, in the authority upon which it rests ; like unto it, in the responsibility which it involves ; for not only is it written in heaven, that duty to my neighbour, neglected or fulfilled, will form part of my future judgment<sup>1</sup>, but my conscience tells me, that were it *not* so, Divine justice would be outraged, and wrong would ultimately triumph. For these things therefore, God *will* bring men into judgment ! Happy they who take warning in time, and do, from their very heart, love their neighbour as themselves !”

It is the more important to heed these truths, because very little experience of the world and its doings is required to convince us that the greater part of human misery is the fruit of human passion. True, the Almighty Disposer of all events regulates and directs, for man's *final* good, circumstances in this life which appear to him the most trivial ; even as in the formation and preservation of the meanest insect we trace the same Omnipotence which made and governs the universe. From Himself, too, He sends troubles upon the sons of men, and in so doing permits the wicked often to be the instruments of his will. Indeed, trouble must ever attach to mortal man. It is our inheritance on earth, as surely as freedom from it is our promised inheritance in heaven<sup>2</sup>. Thus not only when the Lord, chastening whom He loveth, sendeth sickness, sorrow, death, do we know that He so chasteneth us, even as a father the children whom he loveth, regulating the measure of our troubles according to his mercy as well as according to his will ; the object both of his mercy and his will being our salvation, and the hand which wounds being the hand

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xxi. 4. “ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”



which heals; but even when the fraud and malice of *men* weave for us pains and sorrows of a different stamp, we know that they, also, are permitted of our heavenly Father for our final good. This view of human suffering it is which more than reconciles the sufferer, though it does not relieve of their responsibility those who cruelly inflict it. Of the thousand ills, indeed, which rack our hearts, how large a proportion of them are the infliction of man. Man, himself born to trouble, becomes the bitter foe of his fellow-creatures. Social life too often testifies to this truth. To men collectively, the bountiful providence of God supplies from age to age, food, shelter, clothing; surrounds them with relatives and friends, and all the endearing charities of life; gives them his holy word by which they may have companionship even with Himself, and by his sure guidance pass through this world in safety and peace. By the Saviour who is revealed in that word, He stilleth the agitating fears of conscience under a sense of sin, whilst by the Holy Spirit there promised, He assures them a never-failing Comforter. Further, He not only in his word promises a glorious immortality of rest, and peace, and joy, but did raise up from the dead his crucified Son Jesus Christ, that *He* might be the *first-fruits* from the dead; an earnest of the resurrection of his followers; fulfilling, by the exercise of his power, the promise which his mercy had vouchsafed, that man should rise again from the grave, and know sin and death no more. But this hopeful state of comfort—how is it disturbed by man himself! How often, in social life, where neither poverty, nor sickness, nor any special sorrow, as sent from heaven, is present to disturb, human passion brings misery! Envy, hatred, and ill will soon overcloud a prospect which God's bounty leaves so fair<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> That this is really the case where religious principles are not active in counteracting the natural evils of the heart, must be evident

Is it not wise, then, to guard ourselves, by every motive which reason and religion may supply, against unchristian conduct towards our neighbour in life, lest in his death we be left to the dreadful misery of knowing, that recompense *then*, we can offer *none*? Passion once abated, pity will supplant envy; compassion, hatred; remorse, revenge; and the dead will triumph over the living. Thus, even in this lower world, the indulgence of evil passions towards our fellow-creatures finds at last just retribution; and the exercise of kind and benevolent affections, sure recompense—memory goading the wicked with recollections of past injuries which no sorrow can now repair, and soothing the good with the remembrance of past kindnesses which no time can wear away. The nobler motive, however, for curbing the evil, and stimulating the good dispositions of our hearts between man and man, yet remains; and is to be found in the solemn truth, that not only will the evil inflicted upon another in life

to every reflecting mind. Upon the traveller's heart how often does the truth strike with full force! He journeys cheerily perhaps; for all around him is blithe and joyous; and he himself moves in the full flush of health, and with the elastic step of unwearied strength. His spirits are radiant as the glowing landscape before him. When he contemplates the wide-spread fields, green with verdure, or white for the harvest, his soul expands with ardent gratitude to his Creator; and he confesses that God is indeed a gracious God, preserving all things as He created them, for the service of man—willing man's happiness. Every thing around him breathes delight: the very birds of the air, the cattle in the fields, the insect tribes on wing, fluttering away their sunny hour, and teaching us how short our own life may be—all appear to rejoice in their very existence, and in their own notes of praise offer a hymn of thanksgiving to their glorious Creator. Thus as he journeys, and surveys the scene which his progress opens, fancy pictures to him, that in some quiet valley, as it lies before him, with its lowly dwellings, sheltered and secure, peace and quiet have surely fixed their habitations; and as far as a merciful Providence is concerned, his fancy may be realized. But it were a mockery of experience, not to fear, that even there, amid that outward calm, too often the agitating passions of a fallen nature disturb that quiet, and rob the scene of its repose. Where those passions are resisted indeed peace abides; but where they are permitted to exercise their sway, they bring on earth strife for peace, enmity for good will.

bring fearful misery in death to him who hath inflicted it, but that the evil we *do*, or *say*, or *MEDITATE*, against a fellow-creature, must be accounted for, not to him alone, but to Almighty God, who will judge both the oppressed and the oppressor; and who hath declared in terms, plain as they are awful, that as He will judge the despiser of his word, and the contemner of his laws, so He will judge the oppressor of his creatures.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### SURVIVORS.

THE dead hath passed to his rest. The spirit hath returned to the God who gave it, and the bodily frame, ever liable to ills and infirmities, and lately racked perhaps by pain and agony, now lies free from even the fear of ill. Its mortal trials all are past; nor pain nor sorrow reach it more: the form so “fearfully and wonderfully made”—in death as in life, surpassing wonder—will soon be but as the dust from whence it sprung. Yet, with what reverent care do survivors tend the lifeless clay, gaze upon the well-loved features with a strange, lingering look—hopeless, yet not despairing—as if the voice would again address them, the eyes again open and beam upon them, and the brow, now shaded with the awful frown of death, again be radiant with smiles to cheer them as before! Still the garb of the grave, and the narrow dwelling for the dead are duly prepared; and in the preparation Christian hands perform the office with a tender and scrupulous care, which *seems* scarcely requisite for a perishing frame, so soon to tenant the grave, and be no more seen. It is, however, a *holy* care, sanctioned and sanctified by our blessed Lord Himself. He “being dead, yet speaketh.” He deigned to permit,

after death, those affecting ministrations towards Himself by which tenderness delights to relieve its woes, and give proof of its love, when mourning the departed<sup>1</sup>. Affection clings closer and closer still to the object of its care. Nor is this only a tribute which affection pays to memory: it is an evidence which faith bears to truth. It evidences a firm trust in the Divine promise, that the body, though sin has rendered it liable to that corruption into which it must soon be turned, will one day be raised a glorious immortal body—will know death no more, because it will know sin no more, but be like unto Christ's glorious body. Therefore is it worthy our reverential regard, even in death; and Faith thus justifies the pious care with which Feeling decks man's ruins for the grave.

These careful attentions have, to a certain extent, their beneficial influence, and relieve in some degree the heavy hours of sadness which intervene between death and the grave. Misery finds some alleviation in thus hovering round the dead, performing its kind offices, and thinking its kind thoughts, and still pausing, ere the last look be taken. At the grave, too, the solemn Service for the Burial of the Dead itself pours a healing balm into the wounds, then afresh opened; sustains the fainting spirit by the heavenly tone of its exhortations, prayers, and thanksgivings; and, for a season, throws the brightness of hope over the dark hour of bereavement and despair<sup>2</sup>.

The mourners return to their home. There the loved one greeteth them not. The honoured parent—the beloved child—the faithful friend—the brother—the sister! Where the voice which was wont to

<sup>1</sup> Mark xv. 36; xvi. 1; also Luke xxii. 55, 56, and John xix. 39, 40. In Mark xiv. 8, this subject is treated by our blessed Lord Himself in a very affecting manner. The reader would do well to refer to the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> I apprehend that no mourner could ever hear the solemn Service for the Dead, provided by our Liturgy, without acknowledging its excellence, and feeling its power.

cheer them? the eye which spoke its welcome, and the smile its joy? Does no bright gleam break forth from out this gloom? no comfort relieve this utter desolateness? What voice is that which whispers to the heart—"Come to *me*, and be at rest? Come, ye weary and heavy laden, and *I* will refresh you?" Lo! it is a voice from heaven! and does not your full heart respond, in the memorable language of your agonized Saviour, "Then am I *not* alone, because the Father is with me?"—He, to "whom all things in heaven and earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey"—He, who though He dwelleth in heaven, where no man can approach unto, yet beholdeth all the inhabitants of earth—He, who in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, our incarnate God, did promise that He would be all in all to his faithful people, under whatever trials He might place them, and to whatever worldly deprivations He might see fit to subject them—*He*, in the fulness of his power, and love, and mercy, invites you to Himself, and promises, that with *Him* you shall find rest. *He* will be with you in your loneliness—"a *very* present help in this your needful time of *trouble*."

With what earnest desire do you hasten in prayer to the more immediate presence of that gracious Being! You never felt in full force, till *now*, the value of his promise, that even when "he vexeth you with all his storms," He will be "as a hiding place from that wind, and a covert from that tempest<sup>1</sup>." With what hurried step do you retire to your chamber, there flee to Him, and there hide thee under the shadow of his wing, till the tempest calm! You commune with Him: you pour out your heart before Him: the world shut out, He alone is witness to your woe. Him, though invisible, you know to be present in his power, which is almighty; in his mercy, which is unbounded: in his love, which is infinite. And his pre-

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxxii. 2.

sence is life. Remembering the blessed command—"Call upon me in the time of trouble"—you, in this your time of trouble, do call upon Him; you make your prayer unto the God of your life; you "cast all your burden upon him;" and He fulfils his promise—He "sustaineth you," He "delivereth you<sup>1</sup>." You "pray in secret;" "he rewardeth openly." O the blessed power of prayer! Prayer hath gained grace, and grace hath dispelled the darkness which had well-nigh confounded you. A light hath sprung up in that darkness, clearing your understanding to know your God, rectifying your view of his dealings with the children of men, and chasing far away the dark gatherings of despair. Tears indeed find their way—but tears are not forbidden to the mourner. Nay, they are for ever sanctified—"Jesus wept," when he whom He loved died. Not to mourn a blessing reft from us, would well-nigh argue insensibility to blessings given. Tears, too, by a merciful dispensation of the Maker of our frame, are at once the effect of sorrow, and to a degree its alleviation: they are like the rain, which falling from some heavy cloud as it threatens storm, both draws off the tempest, and by its welcome stream renews to the fainting earth its freshness and its powers.

Your mind thus roused by grace in answer to prayer, you dare to look again upon the sorrow from which, in your near communion with God, you had, in some sort, withdrawn yourself. You again feel all its weight, but you feel added strength to bear it. The dark cloud still hangs over you in all its gloom and sadness; but a light gleams from that cloud, which removes its terror, and disarms its power. Your God hath set his bow there—the token of his heavenly presence; the pledge of his love; the assurance of your safety and your peace. Yes! Faith reveals to you the *hand of God* in this your dark sorrow. You

<sup>1</sup> Ps. l. 15.

collect again your scattered powers of thought; you direct them to a juster view of human sorrow; and in a strength beyond your own, you return to the world, a wearied perhaps, but a patient pilgrim, onward on your way to heaven.

You remind yourself that all events, though brought about by man's agency and other secondary causes, are permitted by that omnipotent and omniscient Jehovah, to whom "all things in heaven, and earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey<sup>1</sup>;" you believe that without Him "not a sparrow falleth to the ground;" and that by Him "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." This your cause of mourning, then, is known to Him—nay, it is as He willeth. You struggle with your feelings, and you listen to your reason, and you summon faith to your aid, and you judge yourself; God and your own soul the only witnesses to your self-striving. "What!—is this event according to the will of God, and shall I murmur? Shall I not submit? Shall I not be reconciled? Have I day by day, through life, prayed to Him—'*Thy will be done?*' and now that it is done, shall I complain? Or shall I blindly forget, that as often as this prayer is offered, I have offered it, not with reference to his power, as if *that* were aided by our prayers in accomplishing his will, but in reference to ourselves, that grace might be so fully imparted to us, that *we*, even as angels, should ever delight and always acquiesce in the accomplishment of his will, whatever that will may be? It is *now* his will to afflict me. Oh! may I be enabled still to say from my very heart—'*Thy will be done!*'—'*O Lord! I*

<sup>1</sup> See the Service for the Visitation of the Sick, and the commendatory prayer by which the minister is directed to strengthen the faith of the weak, and animate the hope of the lowly. How wisely does the Church, on that occasion, lead us to this view of an all-present and all-controlling God,—"*The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in him, to whom all things in heaven and earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey, be now and evermore thy defence!*"

believe ; help thou mine unbelief.' I do believe that Thou art equally good, and wise, and gracious ! but I implore Thee 'help thou mine unbelief.' Alas, the infirmity of my nature, how does it bear me to earth, when thy will is so done, that I am called to mourn ! O that I had the patriarch's firmness, and could resolve with him—'though God slay me, yet will I trust in him !' My tongue does indeed confess, that 'it is the Lord : let him do what seemeth him good ;' and my present resolve is to be submissive to this dispensation, and patient under my affliction ; yet my rebellious and wayward heart!—O Father, let thy Spirit of holiness and strength keep me firm to my purpose, and true to my obedience."

Thus recognizing by faith the hand of a heavenly Father in the event which you mourn, you become submissive under his dispensation. Bowing yourself with all reverence before Him as the Supreme Disposer of events<sup>1</sup>; neither looking to the world for consolation, nor trusting to your unassisted powers for strength, but to his promised Spirit for both, you repose under a constant sense of his gracious presence. Nature, it is true, may oftentimes struggle against faith, and tempt you to repine at your sad bereavement. You pray. Grace is the answer to your prayer. The Spirit of God is with you, opening your understanding to "understand the wondrous things" of his providence, as well as "of his law<sup>2</sup>;" bringing to your remembrance all things which may temper your sorrow and assuage your grief; and summoning every consideration which reason and religion present to the mind of man, to make obedience to the will of God easy to you. Hence you will pause to consider, that death is a penalty which must at some time be paid by mortal man ; and therefore, to be paid without a murmur, when He, to whom it is due, demands payment. God hath claimed his own. Nay—death

<sup>1</sup> See p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxix. 18.



is not only a penalty which *must* be paid, it is a penalty, payment of which none of the sons of men, were the decision left to their free choice, would forego. Where is he who would willingly live for ever in this his present state of trial and infirmity? Who would willingly retrace the toilsome path of a long and anxious course; be again young; again begin the voyage of life; meet again its storms and tempests past? And as for the spirits of the blessed, with whom your hope is that those whom you mourn are now mingled, in all the glorious liberty of spirits freed from this encumbering mortal coil,—could aught which this world might offer them, even of health unbroken, and peace undisturbed, prevail upon them again to visit earth? Would Abraham leave his seat in Paradise, even though he might return to more than his own far-spread possessions, and his high and honourable state on earth? Would Lazarus leave his rest in Abraham's bosom, to revisit a world where oppression and wrong made him their sport, and pride spurned him as the victim of misery<sup>1</sup>; even though want were to be exchanged for abundance, trouble for rest, pain for ease, and the outcast be held in honour? Would there be found *one* among the "spirits of the just made perfect," ready to revisit this strange world of change? Would he whom you mourn, and who is now, 'as we humbly trust, of that happy number—would he, think you, be again a sharer of our toilsome pilgrimage; a struggler with us, amid the difficulties of a sinful, weary world, like this? Sure it is, that the departed righteous would never again accept the boon of this life. They are happier even than your affection can imagine them; infinitely more happy than your care could make them. As they *cannot* return to you, so *neither would* they, if power were given them—but "*you will go to them*"<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 20.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 23.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## RECOLLECTION OF MERCIES.

IN seeking consolation, however, far be the thought that you should forget the dead! Indeed, to bid the mourner forget, were to argue alike insensibility to others' woes, and ignorance of the very constitution of our nature: vain, too, as to bid the tide stay its flow, or the winds their course. Christian sympathy rather weeps with them that weep, and bids the mourner *remember*—though wisdom directs memory to recall *mercy* as well as judgment. Withdrawing your mind then for a season, not only from the loss felt by survivors, but even from the final gain of the dead, meditate with grateful recollection on the Divine love, which, throughout the late dispensation, tempered judgment with mercy, and so wonderfully ordered the several circumstances attending it, that your meditations have already led you to recognize in their ordering the hand of a gracious and a present God.

None wonder that you mourn in your affliction. You mourn a father. Sad and heavy is your loss. The wise guide and counsellor; the tender and able protector; the watchful guardian is removed. What a blank life now appears! Yet consider a moment. What was his closing scene? Remember *that!* Your heart, in those hours, used to whisper to you—that such a close of life as *his* were surely a foretaste of heaven. The holy calm, the perfect resignation, the peace of God there evidenced, gave to the scene a serenity, which you can never recall without gratitude. With what humility would he point to himself in proof of the power of Christian faith! “See,” he would say, “See the effect of grace on my heart, in bearing all my pains of body: all my anxieties of mind for you whom

I am about to leave; all my natural apprehensions of launching upon the great ocean of eternity! See how it enables me, not only to bear my trial with fortitude, but to meet it triumphantly." With what collectedness did he both warn and encourage you to begin betimes that discipline of the soul, which faith requires, and which he had long practised to his joy! With what earnestness did he bid you seek diligently in prayer the Spirit of grace to aid you in that work! How boldly did he testify to the power of the Spirit! Under that holy influence his own heart, which, once wilful and turbulent, was wont to chafe at whatever obstacles crossed his path in life, had long since grown calm; the cares which once perplexed and agitated him, had long been laid aside; and he "came to his grave in full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in its season<sup>1</sup>."

You cannot forget the clear views of the past and the future, with which he was thus blest at the close of life, or the words of wisdom with which, in the intervals of pain and anguish, he declared them. When striving to fix upon your heart, and the hearts of those who surrounded him, the assured truth, that religion has "the promise" as well "of the life that now is" as of "that which is to come<sup>2</sup>," he appealed to his own experience; addressing you almost in the patriarch's language—"I have been young, and now am aged, and dying: yet must I bear my testimony to the encouraging truth, that never saw I the righteous forsaken. Oh! follow after righteousness. Nothing else will give you comfort when you come to lie here. Nay, *that* is profitable, even if you can feel no higher motive to actuate you than a wish to be happy as to this world<sup>3</sup> :

<sup>1</sup> Job v. 26.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8.

<sup>3</sup> A writer not less eminent for his piety and wisdom, than for his practical application of them, has testified to this truth in a passage so full of force, that I cannot forbear adding it \* :—"The secret direc-

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\* The writer was SIR MATTHEW HALE, Chief Justice of England in the year 1671. He died in the year 1676, at the age of 76.

how profitable it is, when your aim is everlasting happiness, they best can tell, who have passed from righteousness to glory. With respect to myself, I am going the way of all the earth! but as I look back upon the path I have trodden in this wilderness of life, I can see clearly that Divine mercy has throughout accompanied me. It has often indeed happened that I have had hard struggles with myself, and have needed all my faith to sustain a drooping courage upon the approach of unlooked-for ill, or support a wearied patience

tion of Almighty God is principally seen in matters relating to the good of the soul; yet it may also be found in the concerns of this life, which a good man, that fears God and begs his direction, shall very often, if not at all times, find. I can call my own experience to testify, that even in the external actions of my whole life, I was never disappointed of the best guidance and direction, when I have in humility and sincerity implored the secret direction and guidance of Divine wisdom." This testimony, in itself valuable, becomes inestimable when we look to the character of the witness. He was not only a Christian of exemplary piety. That were enough; and, as far as he himself was individually concerned, all in all. But in reference to his influence upon society at large, he was far more; and his example is proportionably of wider influence. He was a man of extensive erudition, vast acquirement, sagacious discernment, sound discretion, and noble judgment. Of character unimpeached, even in times of unparalleled difficulty, he pursued with inflexible integrity the path of virtue and of honour. "Through good report and evil report," he kept on his way unmoved by either from his appointed course; and leaving his envious maligners to the bitterness of their own hearts, he committed his way unto the Lord, and calmly "waited God's leisure," "to make his righteousness clear." He was what every truly great man is found to be, humble before God, in proportion to the greatness of the blessings vouchsafed to him, and kindly disposed towards his fellow-creatures in proportion as he was exalted above them. He never forgot the unanswerable question—"What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Nor was he ever unmindful, that for the use of every talent committed to his charge, whether learning, wealth, or station, or the influence arising from either, he would be finally responsible to God. From one so learned in true philosophy, of legal powers so acute, and so zealous for truth, as a faithful follower of a meek and lowly Jesus—the testimony thus given upon his own experience, may well confirm our faith, and enliven our hope in that Gospel which professes with no vain pretensions, to have "the promise of the life that now is," as well as "of that which is to come;" pretensions which to his joy, he found justified in his own case, through a long and arduous life.

under the continuance of it ; but now that my mind is cleared from the film which worldly fears and worldly hopes once interposed, I see plainly that every trial has been necessary for me. Perhaps some loss of industrious gain occurred. I was mortified ; and my very soul was vexed within me. I am now aware that such a check to my worldly spirit was needed ; for success began to cause, almost insensibly, a love of the world and its wealth and advantages, which, if unchecked, had made me no longer a servant of God, but a slave to Mammon. Disappointment was mercy ; for it disciplined my soul to seek heavenly treasure. Another time sickness brought down my strength in my journey. I chafed under the mortifying weakness in which I lay ; I could not reconcile myself to the alternate pain and languor of a sick and wakeful couch. But now, indeed long since, I have been convinced, that the word of the Lord is true—He ‘chasteneth whom he loveth.’ He knew that I was naturally inclined to glory in my strength and health. The language of my heart, known to Him, was that of folly—‘Tush, I shall never be cast down ; he hath made my hill so strong :’ and I began to live as though sickness and death were never to be mine. Was it not then mercy which awakened such a sleeper, raised him from the death of sin, and gave him the light of life?—So also, when I had set my heart on this or that object, and disappointment crossed my path, no sooner had I submitted myself, and committed my way unto the Lord, than I found reasons to bless God for it ; the very disappointment ended in my advantage. Events proved either that the gain in prospect would have deceived me, or that it was denied, only that some greater good might happen to me. Indeed, so sure am I that every trial I have had was necessary to discipline my soul for the service of God in heaven, that I bless Him specially for my tribulations—nay, I now ‘glory’ in them ; knowing, as I do, that ‘tribulation

worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed<sup>1</sup>.”

Thus, though at intervals, as strength ebbed and flowed, the venerable parent whom you mourn strove to lay open his own experience of the past, to guide and sustain you—himself he further sustained by declaring his view of the future. “Behold me,” said he, “between the two worlds for which man is formed. From the one I have escaped: to the other I am hastening; and even now discern its shore. True, I must die! How often have my thoughts dwelt upon that solemn truth! How often has the awful question passed my mind—What is this death? What is that change, which will free my soul from its earthly house—this mortal body; and set it free in its own spirituality? I am now about to learn the answer to these questions. My whole frame is evidently giving way: the tabernacle of this body is loosening at every cord, and will soon be unable to hold its habitant—the soul. Dying to this world I must live to another. Do you wonder then why terror does not subdue me? Why an awful apprehension of that hitherto unseen land of spirits does not confound my reason, and terrify my hope!—What if I know that I must die! ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth!’—I know that He liveth for *me*—that He will be with me according to his promise, even when I am passing the waters of death. When my soul shall leave this body of infirmity, and be free to range in its proper element—a spiritual world—this Redeemer will guide, and sustain, and comfort me. If I faint in the day of mine adversity, my strength is indeed small<sup>2</sup>—I have no dread—no fear. Faith conquers.”

Exhausted with his earnestness, here he paused, and it almost appeared as if the silver cord were loosed, not again to hold him in life. At length, however, he raised himself, evidently rallying all his dying powers for one last effort, by which he might let his “light

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 3–5.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxiv. 10.

shine before men," and so give added force to his testimony for the "truth as it is in Jesus." His expressions were peculiar—"I am going!—raise me higher—higher yet!—heaven is before me!—Yet—another word;" . . . . For some time no word was spoken. The pause had less of earth in it than heaven. But at length life's ebbing tide again flowed: and again the dying voice told the travail of his soul. "Now I see before me 'the valley of the shadow of death.' Its shades will soon gather round me—I shall soon walk in that gloomy vale. But no darkness will, even there, cloud my soul. No!—no darkness there! for I trust in the name of the Lord, and stay myself upon my God. 'The Lord will be my light!—*That* He hath promised<sup>1</sup>."

Another pause! . . . . At length, in a tone which struck on the hearts of all around, he suddenly exclaimed—"That pang!—Oh! *that* was death! Often, in moments of serious thought; often have I then wondered in myself what were death's last struggle! I have felt it now! Yet mourn not! Not even now do I feel terror, or fear, or doubt. The promise which for long years has been in my heart, with a hopeful prayer that at my death-hour it might be accomplished, is in me now fulfilled—God's grace be praised! He, a present God—my Creator, my Redeemer, my Sanctifier, 'He is thy plagues, O Death,—He is thy destruction, O Grave.' Is He not? Look at me! You see the death agony indeed to mark my brow! You hear the natural moaning of exhausted nature, in a body worn with age, infirmities, and pain, and in the act of dissolution; but could you see my *heart*—*there* you would find victory over the past; and for the future, peace and rest in the bosom of my God.—Lord Jesus! receive my spirit!—Lord Jesus! come quickly—Blessed, blessed Saviour—O take me to thyself!"

You can never forget the look which followed this

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lx. 19, 20; l. 10.

outpouring of the dying soul! His countenance radiant with joy and triumph! The stillness of death on earth, a fit emblem of his rest in heaven!

Say, mourner, wouldst thou call him back again?

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE BLESSED FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

IT is well, then, to *remember*: taking heed, however, not only to remember the dead in their cold graves, silent and cheerless, dust and ashes—but to remember them before death, in their hour of struggle indeed and agony, yet their hour of triumph and of glory. Is there no consolation in *this* retrospect? O cherish fondly in thy heart the memory of that hour in which they triumphed! Fired by their courage, and sustained by their fortitude, fear not thyself to meet the terrors of death—fear not to endure the pains of it. *They* found that “as their days were, so was their strength<sup>1</sup>.” Thou also wilt find strength proportioned to thy need, when thy day shall come, if only thou followest the same holy course, and seekest the same holy aid.

There may, however, be mourners, who in looking back upon the death-scene, find no such consolatory retrospect. *They* perhaps have witnessed death, when he came shrouding every faculty in darkness, and overpowering every sense in a deep oblivion of the past, and an unconsciousness of the present. Theirs is the language of despondency. “Had we seen life’s sun go down in the brightness of hope, our sorrow then would have been comparatively light and brief. We should have felt it to have been for the most part a selfish sorrow, which reason and religion had united

<sup>1</sup> Refer to p. 76, and the note there inserted upon this subject.



to relieve ; and our minds would gradually have been disciplined to bear resignedly what, in truth, was a sorrow to survivors only ; whereas, disease having rendered every faculty powerless, death seized him whom we mourn, when his senses were confounded and subdued, and the breathing alone testified that he had not already passed to the world of spirits. His departure hence was without one word spoken, one look turned upon us, one sign given ! Memory therefore brings not its consolation to *us*.”—It is on occasions like this, that the value of habitual piety is felt in full force, with respect both to the dead and to survivors—then it is, that even in this world, the righteous have a foretaste of their reward, both in their own blest though unexpressed hopes, and in the comfort which they impart even reflectively to the loved ones they leave behind. What then though infirmity so beset the close of existence, that no *outward expression* of faith and hope be given ? still if there has been an uniformity of Christian conduct in life and health, who shall doubt but that even in the hour of sickness unto death—when the soul found no responsive power in a sinking body to give expression to its feelings—it yet did feel and enjoy the presence of its God ? For myself, I cannot for a moment doubt but that even *then*, though a final barrier intervened between the dying and *survivors*, the soul communed with its *God* in a high and holy converse, to which, when hampered by its earthly ties, it was all a stranger ; that it then learned of the land on which it was about to enter, and prepared itself for that rest, which there awaited the people of God. I the rather urge these considerations, because there are few occasions, where the sorrow of mourners has a stronger claim upon our sympathy, than when aggravated by fears and doubts like these. It must always be borne in mind, that when they, who watch the death-bed, view their dying friend as under the dark influence of apparent unconsciousness, they must not suppose it a necessary consequence that the

sufferer is unconscious, because powerless to express consciousness. There may be power to apprehend whatever tends to soothe pain, to allay fear, to strengthen faith, and animate hope, though no power to give token of recognition—no power to speak the thanks of gratified affection, or even to look acknowledgment of care so soothing. Prayer, therefore, and holy converse, with words of affection, and encouragement, and counsel, may well occupy those moments of awe. To the living, such services assuredly speak comfort: we may hope that they speak encouragement also: and who shall say, that even the dying may not thereby find fears removed, and faith sustained, and hope brightened? Let me open to you such a scene.—

For long and weary hours the sufferer lay, apparently unconscious of all which passed around him. The voice of sympathy poured its soothing tones unheeded: nor movement, nor word, nor look, indicated aught of sensibility to things of this lower world. The hour was indeed dark; and for a season no cheering ray burst forth to mitigate its gloom. At length the voice of a far distant friend, summoned to the sad scene, appeared to awaken the dormant powers, and rouse them into action. “Sure, I know that voice”—“Sure, I do know *that* voice,” repeated the lips of him, whom for many, many hours, weeping friends had lamented, as being lost to sense, ere lost to life. His words were brief yet forcible, distinct and clear; and thus his converse ran.—“I am happy, very happy. No pain. I have never lost my consciousness: only for a long while, no voice, no power. I have been praying. God is with me. Too weak to make prayers: but I remembered my beautiful Church prayers, and the Litany—and I bless God that I loved them early—when a child I knew them and loved them, and I do not forget them now. God is with me: and Jesus Christ is my hope. God’s Spirit comforts me, and tells me that He accepts my repentance through my blessed Saviour; He pardons me: He will

receive my soul. This comforts me.—O yes! great comfort. No pain at all. Bless God! no pain—only no strength. I could not move, nor open my eyes, or speak. Thank God! I can now speak—I cannot see you. Soon I must go quite away—glad you are come—glad when I heard your voice.” . . . The silence of the chamber of death thus broken, you may well imagine how welcome were those sounds; welcome as the last unlooked-for sunbeam, bursting from the evening cloud which long had darkened it. At his request we kneeled down; that with one accord, one heart, and one mind, we might again join in serving that gracious Being on earth, whom the dying trusted so soon to serve for ever in heaven. You may well understand, for your own heart must fully sympathize with the worshippers, the fervent gratitude, and unfeigned reverence, with which prayer and praise were offered to the God of all mercy! How heartfelt the thanksgiving for this proof of his great mercy and loving-kindness! Then, indeed, the Gospel triumphed. Lo! the chamber of death, turned into a temple of praise; the house of mourning, better than the house of joy; and when the loved one passed to his rest, we wept indeed—for ourselves. Who could weep for him<sup>1</sup>?

<sup>1</sup> It is thought right to state, that this scene is faithfully delineated, as the author himself witnessed it. Word for word the dying record is given. Some years have since passed; but the mingled feelings which it called forth; the transitions by which it was marked, from blank hopelessness to the clear and bright reality of heavenly consolations; its triumph over every infirmity which death could accumulate upon the sufferer—the change it effected in the grief of surrounding relatives and friends—the firm tone which it gave to faith in the grace of God here, in his promise of glory hereafter—the brightness it gave to hope—the resignation it cherished—the holy calm which it infused—all were so indelibly impressed upon his mind and heart, that so long as memory holds her seat, the impression can never weaken; and he has recorded it—faithfully, but he trusts not too familiarly—in the humble hope that the fact may, in various points of view, afford both instruction and comfort; pointing out, on the one hand, the blessedness of habitual piety; and on the other hand, testifying in a most marked and striking manner, to the inestimable value of our Liturgy

Can such a scene be contemplated without benefit? Instruction and comfort alike flow from it. With what irresistible force does it urge upon us all an habitual holy life; at peace with God and man! With what authority does it insist upon an uniform watchfulness in spiritual and heavenly things, that the solemn call to death and judgment never finds us unprepared! A long life had this dying Christian passed; many a sharp trial had tested his faith, and tempted his hope; but prayer had been his panoply. So armed, as in life he held his steadfastness, so in death he wavered not. How beautiful to see even *then*, trust in God's goodness, faith in his mercy, reliance on the Saviour, and confiding joy in the Spirit—graces of a Christian life, untouched even by death! Fiercely as the king of terrors assailed him, the God he sought was at hand to give him courage. What, though his foe drove him to a dark and dismal loneliness, on the confines of either world—the light of this world and its sweet charities shut out, and the next world still veiled,—he was not alone. His heavenly Father was with him, "*because he trusted in him*."<sup>1</sup> He never cast away his confidence; *therefore* he was enabled to travel on in imparted strength. The prophet's language best tells the working of this piety. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord; that obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh *in darkness and hath no light*? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." To him the world gave no light, all there was one dark gloom. But his faith never weakened, and his hope never dimmed, and he walked in the light of the Lord.

Whoso would thus die in the Lord, let him *live to the Lord*.

—a ready guide to devotion, not only in health and in the assembled congregation, but in sickness, in sorrow, in solitude; even in the awful loneliness of death.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxvi. 3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: *because he trusteth in thee.*"

If instructive, the scene is consolatory also. We learn, that if to ourselves or others, Death as he strikes his blow, should in like manner press heavily on our sense of outward things, and render us incapable of giving expression to our wants or wishes, of acknowledging the kind offices of attending relatives and friends, and of speaking our testimony to the power of faith, and the consolations of hope; yet where Christian faith has striven in life, we must not doubt but that it will conquer in death. The loved one who lies breathing, indeed, but apparently unconscious of all around him, has still the presence of his God to sustain and soothe him. With that Being he holds converse; to the care of that Being he commends himself. And who shall doubt but that a present God will walk with him even through the solitude of that dark valley over which Death has cast his awful shadow; will bear him safely through its dangers; fearlessly through its terrors; successfully to the end? In the chamber of death, then, whilst the soul yet tenants its mortal dwelling, you are not discouraged, even under circumstances like these, from offering up the sacrifice of prayer. Prayer *must* comfort survivors; it *may* comfort the dying; and though the dark cloud of unconsciousness be impervious to us, there may be light beyond it, of which we see not the brightness; and the sun, which to our sight sets in gloom and terror, may be calmly taking its course to open upon another world in renovated strength, and entering upon a glory which no cloud again shall darken.

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## CHAPTER L.

### FAITH TRIUMPHS.

It can hardly fail, I trust, but that these reflections afford consolation to the Christian mourner. When

he looks to the past, and pictures to himself the dead as those, in whose heart the light of hope, fed by a heavenly flame, burned with clear and steady light, amid even the dark and gathering clouds of death; when he remembers that having wisely "taken oil in their vessels, with their lamps," though they might sometimes "slumber and sleep," under the wearying weight of human infirmities, yet were they ever ready to trim their lamps and renew their light at what moment their Lord should summon them<sup>1</sup>—the retrospect is so full of peace and hope, that no longer dwelling on the loss he has sustained in this world, his heart is raised in ardent aspirations after the sure mercies promised in the next.

But other mourners there are, to whom the same reflections bring no consolation. Who shall not pity *them*? *They*, perhaps, may be called to bewail some

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 1—3. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." The whole of the parable is replete with rich and varied instruction. It especially teaches us that a profession of godliness profiteth nothing, without the substance of it. Both are necessary to our salvation. As without the lamp, oil would be supplied to little purpose, so without oil the lamp would be useless. In like manner the form of godliness, to benefit the soul, must be accompanied by the power of it\*. Religious profession is the lamp, by bearing which we confess ourselves the servants of the Lord; piety is the oil to feed the lamp, that it may shine and give light, at whatever hour the Lord shall summon us to meet Him. We learn further, that those who profess the name of Christ, are not justified in their neglect of such duties as their state of life requires of them, under pretence of devotion. From the *acts* of devotion, we are occasionally free; from a *spirit* of devotion *never* free. The lamp is not always to be burning; but the oil is always to be ready. Even the wise virgins were permitted to "slumber and sleep," so long as they were ready when their Lord came. So David consoles himself for his imperfect services, by remembering that where the heart is right, God mercifully allows occasional cessation from the outward services of devotion, according to his own gracious word—"I will not reprove thee, because of thy sacrifices, or for thy burnt-offerings; because they were *not always* before me †."

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\* 2 Tim. iii. 5.

† Ps. l. 8.

wicked one, who has been removed, sinful and impenitent, as far as human knowledge can discern in a case so awful—who not only in death gave no token of a Christian hope, but in life gave no evidence of a Christian faith. Such mourners heed not the voice of sympathy. Theirs is the affecting remonstrance—‘How bid ye *us* be comforted! Around *us* there is only one dark gloom!’—If the reader of these pages thus sorroweth, let him not sink under this sad misery. There *are* sources of consolation even for him. Let him set his affections on things *above*; let him have in all his thoughts, the God who dwelleth there; let him search the word of truth, which that God did send from above; let him commune with himself on the high and holy things there revealed. Reason and revelation will then unite to sustain his drooping heart, and cheer his fainting spirit; and though the trial to which he is called as a mourner be in all its weight and bitterness—a cross heavy and painful; a cup, full to overflowing, and bitter to the very dregs—yet shall he gain strength to bear the one, and comfort to sweeten the other. Let him look stedfastly to the *eternal* world, whither we are all hastening; and consider well, what view he will *then* take of this severe trial of his faith<sup>1</sup>; so may he find rest to his soul: for, severe as the trial is, he will then understand, that it is appointed, as all trials, of every kind, however varying in degree and character, are appointed, to *prove* man’s confidence in God; even as

<sup>1</sup> It is a thoroughly wise habit of mind in all cases, especially in any doubtful or difficult course of action, whether in adversity or prosperity, to *pause* ere we determine upon it; and ask ourselves—‘How shall I estimate this apparent loss or gain, this pain or pleasure in a *future* world?’ Wisdom would often avail herself of that pause to influence our minds, and regulate our course aright—to dissuade us from pursuing some worldly advantage which might compromise our duty; to urge a patient bearing under some trial of our faith which tempts to murmuring; and win us over to some virtuous self-denial, some holy resolve, which we had well-nigh cast from us. When tempted by pleasure to forget God, or by sorrow to distrust Him, it is a thought, salutary as comforting, that “*the end is not yet.*”

gold is tried seven times in the fire<sup>1</sup>. With respect to himself, therefore, the fact, with all its pain and grief, is to be considered as part of the weight of the cross which it may please the Father to lay upon him; and with respect to the dead, happily it is not for man to determine the future state of his fellow-creatures, or to pronounce what may be their acquittal or condemnation before their Almighty Judge. Our blessed Lord has left us the clearest and most unerring counsel to guide us in all such difficulties. Whatever happens to ourselves or others, not only are we directed to leave the final disposing thereof to the will and mercy of the Supreme<sup>2</sup>; but we are forbidden to judge another, or to decide upon another's final acceptance or rejection before God<sup>3</sup>. Each individual, even the best and the holiest among the sons of men, has enough, and more than enough, of himself to do to prepare his own soul for heaven. How forcibly does our Divine Teacher thus instruct us, in his memorable

<sup>1</sup> Does the refiner purify the silver stream seven times in the fire \*? The Lord proveth his faithful servants, and trieth them like as silver is tried; so as by fire †. And who shall wonder? "He is," indeed, "like a refiner's fire ‡."

<sup>2</sup> It must never be forgotten, that since time is as nothing in the sight of God—a thousand years as one day, and one day as a thousand years—survivors can never know, either what contrition may have taken place in the soul of the dying, even in that awful hour when, though consciousness may remain, all power of giving expression to its feeling shall have passed away; or what reconciliation may have been effected, if, even then, the soul turn with all its remaining powers to its Saviour and its God. For any individual indeed to trust in this thought, as a ground for delaying repentance, would argue folly even to madness in a mortal man, whose tenure of life is so precarious, that any moment may summon him to that judgment, which will pass him to everlasting misery, if he die with his sins unrepented of and unforgiven—to eternal joy, if he die a pardoned sinner, reconciled and accepted. Yet the truth must not be concealed; tending, as it does on the one hand to check the presumption and harsh judgment of self-righteousness; and on the other, to soothe the sacred sorrows of affection.—See p. 118, N.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 253.



reply to those, who with natural curiosity on the awful subject of a future judgment, inquired as to the number of the redeemed—whether the more would be saved or lost—“Lord, are there *few* that be *saved*?” His reply, brief, and emphatic as brief—conveys counsel, at once wise, and safe, and comforting: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Do we not all feel that the counsel is mercifully adapted to our infirmities? Does not each man find toil and labour sufficient for the soul, in working out his own salvation, and keeping that strait and narrow path of holiness, which leadeth unto life eternal, without entangling himself in such inquiries as called forth our Lord’s rebuke—*vain* inquiries, when time of *trial* is *past*? Our own individual course is an *onward* course. In the fight of faith, if our fellow-soldiers contend manfully, we are encouraged; we follow in their path; we contend the more earnestly: and even when they have passed to their reward, the memory of their example animates us<sup>1</sup>. But, if they fall back, desert their standard, and perish in their faithlessness—we grieve indeed, and are sore vexed: *our own* course, however, is still the same—*onward*. We are not to pause and suspend our exertions, that we may inquire with forbidden curiosity into the consequences to themselves individually of their dereliction of duty. What may be the eternal state of the individual is by the Divine counsels concealed from us; and remains among the hidden things of God<sup>2</sup>. With respect,

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 12—27. “He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” We find in the conclusion of this parable, that of the faithful servants, one was set over *ten* cities, another over *five*; both rewarded, though apparently in unequal measure. But it appears, that as both parties had acted well according to their ability, so each was rewarded according to his capacity of receiving and appreciating reward.

<sup>2</sup> There is yet a stern instruction in these fears. That they are felt by us for others, is as a heavenly monitor; warning, that unless

therefore, to others already passed into the spiritual world, their probation is ended: and "God will give to every man, according as his work hath been." If your mind lingers still upon this death-scene, which memory presents to you in its dark hopelessness; if, as you are about to resume the active duties of life, these agitating fears disturb you, you must resolutely keep your affections on things above; you must have your conversation in heaven; you must, "in heart and mind, ascend whither our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ is gone before<sup>1</sup>." To this end, study "the *whole* counsel of God;" contemplate Him, as revealed in the Gospel of his Son; meditate upon his wondrous nature as there

we also repent, they will be felt by others for ourselves. Can there be a stranger contradiction in human character than is evidenced in the fact, that those who for the everlasting welfare of relatives, friends, and neighbours, manifest the most sincere and anxious care, should so often appear totally regardless of their own hope of heaven, as if either a wish on their part would secure it to them, or others could be as indifferent to their welfare as they themselves are? Too many there are, who, whilst in tender love they shrink in horror at the thought, that parent or child, relative or friend, or fellow-creature, should fall short, either of that righteousness in life which leadeth to peace, or that holiness in death which breatheth hope—are as reckless for themselves, as if for them the pains of hell had no terrors, and the glories of heaven no joy. Wise, indeed, it is, never to cease this anxious care for others' welfare. Well does such care become them! But let them at the same time take good heed *themselves* to avoid those sinful courses, the evil consequences of which they profess so much to dread in the case of *others*. A bad example far more than counter-vails the best counsel. Does the parent dread in his children the fearful consequences of sabbath-breaking, idleness, evil-speaking, or other species of irreligion! Let him, for *himself*, keep the Sabbath holy; let him be himself active in "every good word and work;" let him for himself "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with his God." So shall his example be honoured, his counsel be heeded, and his warning voice not uttered in vain—for his "children shall rise up and call him blessed." Is it possible for any man to be so blind and insensible, either as not to see that if Divine vengeance will punish unrepented sins in the case of others, it will not spare the same sins in himself; or as his heart rejoices in a good and virtuous child, not so to lead his own short life of trial here, in all godliness and honesty, that he may be cheered by the hope of sharing with his child hereafter a life of rest and joy for ever!

<sup>1</sup> See the Collect for Ascension Day.

declared to us, and the wondrous change promised to ourselves in the world beyond the grave; that by so "acquainting thyself with God"—meditating upon what He *is*, and what *we shall be*<sup>1</sup>—you may learn to calm, if not remove, these fears, and in patience possessing your soul, find peace and joy in believing. What then are the attributes, and what is the nature of that God, whose presence will be your heaven; whose glories, the subject of your everlasting praises; and his perfections, your wonder and joy through the endless ages of eternity?—His *holiness* is so complete, that though such was his love to man, that He gave his Son to die for him, He cannot love what continues evil: and in a future state of being, as He cannot love the wicked, so they must be driven from his presence—cast out for ever. In like manner his *happiness* is perfect. That can never be clouded, though impenitent worlds were to pass to their punishment. Now it is revealed to us, that when Christ shall appear, the righteous, being admitted to their blessed inheritance in the kingdom prepared for them "will see God face to face, and be made *like unto Him*"—like unto Him in holiness and happiness: a similitude perfect in kind, though imperfect in degree. See we not then, that immortal spirits also, themselves for ever holy and for ever happy, will be unable either to

<sup>1</sup> St. John, indeed (1 John iii. 2), when he directs his beloved to look forward to their blessed change after death, after glorying that "now are we the sons of God," immediately adds, "and it doth *not* yet *appear* what we *shall be*." But this expression denotes only that with our present limited faculties, we are incapable of comprehending the *extent* of that change—the *fulness* of that heavenly inheritance, which is consequent upon our adopted sonship. And though so vastly beyond our present conceptions will be the glories of an hereafter, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him \*;" there is no uncertain knowledge as to the promised inheritance itself. The uncertainty is one as to *degree*, not as to enjoyment.

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\* Isa. liv. 4. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

love any thing which is not holy, or to know diminution of happiness, even from witnessing the sufferings of others, whoever those sufferers may be? We can draw no other conclusion. The love of God will be all in all—a feeling so absorbing, that what *He* loves, that alone shall the blessed love. All the kindly feelings which here had their exercise in mingled love to God and his creatures, will then be centred in Him; and the sweet charities of life, *here* resting indiscriminately upon those whom various earthly bonds unite in common affection, will *hereafter* not only be enlarged beyond our capacities now to comprehend, but will be spiritualized also: and so expanded and purified, will form an harmonious bond of love between “the spirits of the just made perfect;” “a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues:” all having one great object—to celebrate the love and the praise of their God. Nor will it then be possible for the happiness of the faithful to know diminution or change, even should any be absent from the company of immortal spirits in heaven, who were of their fellowship or kindred here on earth. The happiness of each shall be, according to their capacities, *perfect*; neither shall they again know doubt, or care, or sorrow. “*Every* tear being then wiped from every eye,” “there the wicked cease from troubling;” there even those sorrows which fill the souls of the righteous, when they witness, in life or in death, the evil course of wicked men, and see them dishonouring God, causing wretchedness to their fellow-creatures, and bringing ruin upon their own souls—even *those* troubles caused by the wicked there cease. The spirits of the just cannot love aught which God loveth not; and their happiness, being complete, as it needed not the participation of others to perfect it, so the exclusion of others diminishes it not: else had Abraham bewailed, and Lazarus found no rest, when the wretched Dives was in torments, from which he implored relief, but implored in vain.

Dives indeed thought, and thought with horror, upon the wretched course of life which his surviving brethren were pursuing in the world he himself had left; but those agonized feelings were *part of his punishment*. Between him and the blessed “there was a great gulf fixed”—an impassable barrier—even the perfect love of God; a barrier which, whilst it excluded sympathy with the condemned, excluded as a necessary consequence, any feeling which might diminish that fulness of joy, which the love and presence of their heavenly Father extend to the righteous. So impossible will it be for the pure and holy spirits of the blessed to love that which God loveth not, or to know diminution of happiness, when once admitted into the mansions of the blessed.

When meditating upon this high and awful subject, God forbid that we should presumptuously pry into the hidden things of the Almighty! The “ground whereon we stand” is indeed “holy ground,” and well does it become us to “put off our shoes from off our feet”—to remove all mere earthly views of a matter so spiritual; yet it is wisdom, it is duty, thankfully to receive, as added motives to a holy life, whatever intimations our Divine Teacher may have been pleased to give of our eternal state; and, as far as He has revealed the future by the light of his word, humbly to contemplate it for our instruction and comfort. Not to see that on the point in question He has mercifully vouchsafed sufficient knowledge to check the fear we have been considering, and set us free from those perplexing thoughts which otherwise might have destroyed our peace in life, and darkened our hope in death—were to close our eyes against blessing. Thanks to this “marvellous great light,” our view is sufficiently clear for safe guidance: and in proportion as faith operates upon the mind and heart, its power will remove every doubt, calm every apprehension, and enable us to repose our whole trust and confidence on *Him*, “in whose presence there is *fulness of joy* ;” and

who, to those who are admitted into his presence, will communicate that joy in all its fulness; every accepted soul there rejoices, for ever, undisturbed in serenity of bliss. I trust, therefore, that if in some darker moments of sorrow, the mourner's grief ever be rendered more poignant by fear as to the state, after death, of those who have lived unchristian lives, the considerations here brought forward may serve to calm his spirit; reminding him that even this sad trial—this weighty cross—is not to be borne for ever. Pass a few years of this transitory life, and the burden will be removed, to be borne again no more. Thus let him raise his soul high above this troublesome world, and “fix it where true joys are to be found”—joys, which not even those agitating fears can reach: even the joys of heaven, which neither memory of the past nor anticipations of the future shall diminish or change.

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## CHAPTER LI.

## THE MOURNING MOTHER COMFORTED.

THAT the *aged* should sicken and die, although it grieves us to witness their suffering in sickness, and their removal by death, is yet an event which a calm consideration of the general ordering of God's providence does much to relieve and reconcile. We see all things come to an end. It must be so: for the shadow of death which entered into the world with sin, passed over all created things, animate and inanimate<sup>1</sup>; though THE SUPREME controlleth for man's benefit, even the consequences of man's sin, by making death, which man himself brought in by sin, the

<sup>1</sup> “Cursed is the ground, for thy sake.”

door to that immortality, for which he was originally created. The death of the aged, therefore, is but according to the Divine wisdom, which ruleth over all. As the sun knoweth his going down, so man now has no sooner passed his meridian of life, than he descends naturally to his setting, and passeth away, far hence, to rise in a new world with renovated strength and glory. We find, therefore, that when Christian faith and Christian hope sustain them, those who, far advanced in years, have long suffered under the infirmities of body and anxieties of mind incidental to mortality, are themselves more than reconciled to the change awaiting them in death; and though many a day of pain is soothed, many a night of waking cheered, by reflecting, that in suffering patiently the various trials of sickness—and so evidencing the power of the Divine word, with the efficacy of Divine grace—their lives are not passed otherwise than to the glory of their God; yet, wearied with long toil, they generally look with resignation and even joy to the hour, which shall end their pilgrimage, and bear them to their promised home in heaven. Reason and religion thus unite in affording consolation to the mourning survivors. Every hour we live, every step we take, every word we speak, every thought we breathe, as they bring us nearer to the grave, bear us nearer and nearer to our final meeting with those loved ones gone before us. Thus it is, that gradually the pain of the past is lost in joyous anticipation of the future<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> If this consideration bring comfort to us, when we carry our thoughts to those, whom in death as in life we honoured; whilst our hearts, softened by sorrow, fill with love both to God and man; so it may serve as a salutary check to those who, from any offence taken, any clashing or mutual interests, any feeling of wounded pride or broken regard, are about to act towards a neighbour or fellow-creature in an uncharitable or unkind spirit. "Every step you take"—so conscience whispers them—"brings you nearer to the grave; and after that comes the judgment. If you yield to this temptation of injuring your neighbour, in thought, word, or deed, how will you meet him *then*? Are you of a revengeful or malicious spirit? Do you delight

But thou, weeping mother! thou refusest to be comforted! What are thoughts like these to thee? *Thou* mournest the *inverted* order of human events. Thou mournest a daughter. Thine is the impassioned lamentation of a heart, which consolation vainly tries to soothe.—“Oh! that I had died for thee, my child! Must then the young be taken and the aged left? Is failing strength like mine to be spared, with its tottering step and wearied spirits; and art thou in thy youth and beauty to be taken; thy spirits all joyous, thy step firm and active? Speak to me, my child, yet once again! Once more look upon me, my loved and beautiful! Cheer my aching heart, as thou wert wont. Smile once again on thy mother—heart-broken!” . . . Who shall wonder that nature thus bewails; though not even your voice shall wake the dead. The warm cheerful current of life is suspended; and the form is fixed, as the frozen waters—cold and motionless. Yet view it again. Is it indeed your

to give pain, where you have taken offence; to stir strife, where you may have been disappointed; yourself to rise in fame upon the ruins of another's good name?—Remember, you are nearing your grave!—the grave which buries every error—covers every defect—extinguishes every resentment.”

Sure it is, that the proud and revengeful shall *one day* lament, with a compunction which wiser thoughts had spared them, that they should ever have warred with dust and ashes, to which their enemy and they must alike come. From the grave should spring only the flowers of sweetness, fond regrets, and tender recollections!

Indeed, the consideration is every way important. It serves to check evil by reminding us that every step we take in a sinful course, must bring us nearer to the borders of that grave, which will pass us to our strict and solemn account for eternity: and in that prospect he is a bold man, who “refraineth” not “his foot from evil.”—It tends also to reconcile every trial, by the near prospect of its close; for who would be impatient of a sorrow which soon will end, when his patient continuance in well-doing, for the brief space of a short and uncertain life, gives hope of glory, and honour, and immortality? What strength does that thought supply in the path of holiness?

Whoso thus watches his steps is wise; and “whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered\*.”

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\* Prov. xxviii. 26.



daughter? True, not long since she tenanted that form; but she has left it now. She herself is in another and a better world. You humbly hope that she is in paradise, with the spirits of the just made perfect; where the departed saints of every age are in bliss, awaiting the last trumpet-call, to resume their once mortal bodies, and find them immortal—glorious, like unto Christ's glorious body, and fit dwellings for their immortal spirits. *This* body, then, over which you hang in agony, is not the daughter who was your delight and joy. It is but the tabernacle she once inhabited. The casket is left, but the treasure is gone—recalled by *Him*, even the Lord of life and death, who having entrusted you with it for a season, at length wills to reclaim his own: ready for that day, “when he shall make up his jewels<sup>1</sup>.” Though during her short passage through this life, she was as good as your anxious heart could wish her, she is now in scenes far more congenial with her pious soul, than those which she has left. Her gentle spirit is at rest with God. Whilst you are contending in the busy turmoil of this lower world, remember!—*she* has no care, for her dwelling is where all is peace; *she* has no fear, for she rests where all is safety; *she* has no doubts, for she reposes where all is certainty of bliss for ever. Your heaviest cares thus lose half their weight. Your own troubles—how easily are they borne, when you reflect that she shares not their burden! She is far—far above them. You need not weep for her, as if she were any longer an object of your compassion. When of late we saw her labouring to sustain what weakened powers of life remained; striving against pain; her breath failing, and her trembling frame agitated by the awful strife of death—then indeed who could behold, and not weep tears of anguish? You wept—we all wept—she alone wept

<sup>1</sup> Mal. iii. 17. “And they”—the righteous—“shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”

not. Nor were our tears *then* shed in vain for her. 'Tis true, she bade us check them: but as they flowed in heartfelt sympathy, she welcomed, and was grateful for them. They could not heal, but they could and they did soothe: they could not recall life, but they betokened that love, which gives to life its charm: and all the tender offices you ministered, unable though they were to check the progress of disease, or avert the hand of death, were at once grateful to the object of them, and comforting to the anguished heart which ministered unto them: like the pious services of the faithful to our blessed Lord, they were sanctified by their motive<sup>1</sup>.

Let me recall to your recollection the closing day of your daughter's sojourn here; and the instructive scene which it presented. Finding the time of her departure drawing nigh, she prepared, with the deepest humility, and the holiest joy, to partake of "the most comfortable sacrament of the body and blood of Christ"—adding, in the firm and hopeful language of our Liturgy—"This I do ' in remembrance of his meritorious cross and passion, whereby alone I look to obtain remission of my sins, and be made partaker of the kingdom of heaven<sup>2</sup>.'" Thus, too, she further

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 10, 12, 13. "When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. . . For in that she hath poured this ointment upon my body, she did it for my burial. Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." See p. 259, note.

<sup>2</sup> I am here forcibly reminded of an occasion, upon which one of the highest personages of the land sought and found in this holy ordinance, a strength to meet every severity of trial which no earthly power could furnish, nor the kingdoms of the world supply. And though many years have since passed\*, yet the record is not less instructive, nor the example less forcible. It will be remembered, that in the spring-tide of youth, surrounded by anxious relatives and friends, and the object of the heartfelt prayers of an expecting nation, the late PRINCESS CHARLOTTE of Saxe Coburg died: as did

testified her hope—"My blessed Saviour instituted that holy ordinance, when his own death was at hand; I, his unworthy dying servant, trust that mercy may be with me, if I, in the prospect of my death, partake thereof, and as my last act of outward obedience, obey his last command." You will never forget your dear dying daughter at that hour—her more than earthly calm; her serene and collected air; her own tranquillity diffusing itself over the whole scene—long will you remember that scene. The sob of anguish even in your own heart was hushed; and as she took the emblems of her Redeemer's love, *her* voice alone was heard—weak, indeed, and gentle even to faintness, yet distinct and clear—pouring forth its last words of faith, and hope, and thankfulness. "O blessed body, broken for *me*! What strength to my

the infant to which she had given birth. For this sudden wrench from life, however, and from all those earthly blessings which might seem to render life desirable, she had prepared herself, with a wisdom as Christian as it was exemplary. No sooner did she find her trial as a mother approaching, than she strengthened her soul by partaking of the holy Sacrament. She "received the cup of salvation, and called upon the name of the Lord\*." Blessed was she in her deed! The grace she so sought was mercifully vouchsafed, according to her need. As her days were, so was her strength. When the event which had been anticipated with joy closed in sorrow, and mother and infant passed from life to death—no murmur escaped her dying lips; no complaining mingled with her prayers; no lingering love of that world which had smiled upon her, found place in her thoughts; the earthly crown which awaited her in this life, she readily resigned, in the view of that heavenly crown which she humbly trusted awaited her in the next; and as she was about to take leave of the world where she would have reigned a queen, every hope centred in her God. As a sinful mortal, her aim was to gain his pardon; as reconciled through the Saviour, her care was to win his favour; as an immortal spirit, her ambition was to secure an immortality of joy; and her last words were in humble submission to his dispensations—"God's will be done!"

Behold, then, and see, that, alike to rich and poor, to sovereigns and their subjects, Jesus Christ is the only refuge in the needful time of trouble—but HE is a *sure* refuge. The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, supply not such; yet to royalty and to poverty is it equally free. May we all have grace to seek it!

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\* Ps. cxvi. 12.

soul! What strength to my faith in God's promise of forgiveness of sin, for his sake! O blessed Blood, shed for *me!* What refreshment to my soul, what brightness to my hope!—Jesus my strength, my hope, my life! O grant!"—and here with clasped and uplifted hands, she raised her look to heaven, with an energy and fervour of which sinking nature had long seemed incapable—"O grant that, being one with Thee spiritually by faith, now, I may be one with Thee hereafter, for ever<sup>1</sup>!"

She felt no anguish then. She *then* shed no tear of sorrow; though the tear of holy—heavenly *joy* glistened full and bright, whilst in a faith, pure as aught of earth can be, she thus partook of the holy supper of the Lord, and applied to her soul its gracious benefits. "Thank God!—Thank God!"—though in tones scarcely audible, yet fell from her lips. Even you, at that moment, appeared as if you could have parted from her without a pang. Your full heart declared your conviction, that she was, indeed, "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." She then, as you will remember, reposed, and retired into her own thoughts, which were doubtless with "God and with his Christ." Death, however, was advancing rapidly. Pain had subsided, but her bodily weakness had increased. Still her thoughts were for others. In lamenting her own unworthiness in the sight of God, she warned the young who were around her—"Never do or say any thing to, or *of* others, which in death you will be sorry to have said or done! Think, what will make you

<sup>1</sup> That this spiritual and heavenly union might be perfected by his mediation was the object of the Redeemer's beautiful and affecting prayer, when He committed his Church for ever to the care of his Father.—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that *they* also may be *one in us*: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me\*."

\* John xvii. 20, 21.

happy *then*: and *that* do. If I ever have offended any of you, forgive me. You have all been so kind to me, that I have nothing to forgive. I have only to thank you. I do thank you. God ever bless you all!" Seeing you still weeping, she once again rallied what powers remained to her, and with a marvellous firmness, which appeared indicative rather of returning life than approaching dissolution, she thus expressed to you, clearly and distinctly, her hope, and the grounds of it:—"Mother, I am going from you—but not for ever! I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will save me. My gracious heavenly Father promises me in my Bible, that He will save those who repent and believe—I repent and believe. If I had my time to come over again, I would pray for grace to make better use of it; and I would love you all even more dearly than I have done. I trust that the Holy Spirit, who comforts me in this hour, will go on to comfort me. Surely He is now speaking peace to me. Else how could I feel *not afraid to die*? Yet, I am not afraid. Oh! bless God for that." . . . . And thus she strove to relieve your deeply-wounded heart by pouring in the balm of her own heavenly hope. The smile which then overspread her countenance, memory will ever cherish—a smile, such as lights not up the eye of *suffering*—suffering was past—a smile it was, so bright, so radiating, that had no word been spoken, no assurance given, of the glorious hope of immortality, that alone might have indicated the hope to be from heaven. Nay, even your own sad heart, for the moment, ceased to grieve. At length, finding her end at hand, she appeared to collect herself for a last effort: an effort, equally noble in its motive, and heroic in its spirit. Forcibly laying aside every selfish consideration, even at that trying moment, she whispered to her attendant—"Turn me round, do not let my mother *see* me die—she could not bear that." Thinking that she slept, all were silent: nor was the silence disturbed, save that twice her failing voice