

The Valley of Tears!

By

Hannah More

Once upon a time methought I set out upon a long journey, and the place through which I traveled appeared to be a dark valley, which was called *the Valley of Tears*. It had obtained this name, not only on account of the many sorrowful adventures which poor passengers commonly meet with in their journey through it — but also because most of these travelers *entered* it weeping and crying, and *left* it in very great pain and anguish. This vast valley was full of people of all colors, ages, sizes and descriptions. But all were traveling the same road; or rather they were taking different little paths which all led to the same common end.

At first setting out on his journey, each traveler had a small lamp so fixed in his bosom, that it seemed to make a part of himself; but as this “natural light” did not prove to be sufficient to direct them in the right way, the King of the country, in pity to their wanderings and their blindness, out of his gracious condescension, promised to give these poor wayfaring people an additional supply of light from his own royal treasury.

But as he did not choose to lavish his favors where there seemed no disposition to receive them — he would not bestow any of his oil on such as did not think it worth asking for. “Ask, and you shall receive,” was the universal rule he laid down for them. Many were prevented from asking through pride and vanity, for they thought they had light enough already; preferring the feeble glimmerings of their own lamp, to all the offered light from the King’s treasury.

Yet it was observed of those who rejected it as thinking they had enough, that hardly any acted up to what even their own natural light showed them. Others were deterred from asking, because they were told that this light not only pointed out the dangers and difficulties of the road, but by a certain reflecting power it turned inward on themselves, and *revealed to them ugly sights in their own hearts* to which they rather chose to be blind; for those travelers “chose darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Now it was remarkable that these two properties were inseparable, and that the lamp would be of little outward use — except to those who used it as an internal reflector. A threat and a promise also never failed to accompany the offer of this light from the King: a *promise*, that to those who improved what they had, more should be given; and a *threat*, that from those who did not use it wisely, should be taken away even what they had.

I observed that when the road was very dangerous, when terrors and difficulties and death beset the faithful travelers — then, on their fervent importunity, the King voluntarily gave large and bountiful supplies of light, such as in common seasons never could have been expected; always proportioning the quantity given to the necessity of the case: “As their day was” — such was their light and strength.

Though many chose to depend entirely on their own lamp, yet it was observed that this light was apt to go out, if left to itself. It was easily blown out by those violent gusts which were perpetually howling through the wilderness, and indeed it was the natural tendency of that unwholesome atmosphere to extinguish it; just as you have seen a candle go out when exposed to the vapors and foul air of a damp room. It was a melancholy sight to see multitudes of travelers heedlessly pacing on, boasting they had light enough, and despising the offer of more.

But what astonished me most of all, was to see many, and some of them, too, accounted men of first-rate intelligence, actually busy in blowing out their own light; because, while any spark of it remained, it only served to torment them, and point out things which they did not wish to see. And having once blown out their own light, they were not easy until they had blown out that of their neighbor’s also; so that a good part of the wilderness seemed to exhibit a sort of universal “blind-man’s-bluff”, each endeavoring to catch his neighbor, while his own voluntary blindness exposed him to be caught himself, so that each was actually falling into the snare he was laying for another.

Now I saw in my vision, that there were some others who were busy in strewing the most gaudy flowers over the numerous bogs, precipices, and pitfalls, with which the wilderness abounded — thus making danger and death look so mirthful, that the poor thoughtless creatures seemed to delight in their own destruction. Those pitfalls did not appear deep or dangerous to the eye, because over them were raised mirthful edifices with alluring names. These were filled with singing men and singing women, and with dancing, and feasting, and gambling, and drinking, and jollity, and madness. But though the scenery was mirthful, the footing was unsound. The floors were full of holes, through which the unthinking merrymakers were continually sinking. Some tumbled through in the middle of a song, many at the end of a feast. And though there was many a cup of intoxication wreathed with flowers — yet there was always *poison* at the bottom!

But what most surprised me, was that though no day passed over their heads in which some of these merry-makers did not drop through — yet their loss made little impression on those who were left. Nay, instead of being awakened to more watchfulness and self-denial by the continual dropping off of those about them — several of them seemed to borrow from thence an argument of a directly contrary tendency, and the very shortness of the time was only urged as a reason to use it more sedulously for the indulgence of sensual delights! “Let us eat and drink — for tomorrow we die!” “Let us crown ourselves with rose-buds before they are withered.” With these, and a thousand other such little mottoes, the mirthful garlands of the wilderness were decorated.

Some admired poets were working to set the most corrupt sentiments to the most harmonious tunes — these were sung without scruple, chiefly, indeed, by the looser sons of riot, but not seldom also by the more orderly daughters of sobriety, who were not ashamed to sing, to the sound of instruments, sentiments so corrupt and immoral, that they would have blushed to speak or read them. But the music seemed to sanctify the corruption, especially such as was connected with immorality or drinking.

Now I observed, that all the travelers who had so much as a spark of life left, seemed every now and then, as they moved onwards, to cast an eye, though with very different degrees of attention, towards the Happy land, which they were told lay at the end of their journey. But as they could not see very far forward, and as they knew there was a dark and *shadowy valley*, which must needs be crossed before they could attain to the Happy land — they tried to turn their attention from it as much as they could.

The truth is, they were not sufficiently apt to consult a *map* which the King had given them, and which pointed out the road to the Happy land so clearly, that the “wayfaring man, though simple, could not err.”

This map also very correctly defined the boundaries of the Happy land from the land of Misery, both of which lay on the other side of the dark and shadowy valley. But so many beacons and lighthouses were erected, so many clear and explicit directions furnished for avoiding the one country and attaining the other — that it was not the King’s fault, if even one single traveler got wrong.

But I am inclined to think, that in spite of the map, and the King’s word, and his offers of assistance to get them thither — the travelers in general did not heartily and truly believe, after all, that there was any such country as the Happy land. Or at least, the paltry and transient pleasures of the wilderness so besotted them, and the thoughts of the dark and shadowy valley so frightened them — that they thought they should be more comfortable by banishing all thought and concern.

Now I also saw in my dream, that there were *two roads* through the wilderness, one of which every traveler must needs take.

The first road was narrow, and difficult, and rough — but it was infallibly safe. It did not admit the traveler to stray either to the right hand or to the left — yet it was far from being destitute of real comforts or sober pleasures.

The other was a “broad and tempting way”, abounding with luxurious fruits and gaudy flowers to tempt the eye and please the appetite. To forget the dark valley, through which every traveler was well assured he must one day pass, seemed, indeed, the object of general desire.

To this great end, all that human ingenuity could invent was industriously set to work. The travelers read, and they wrote, and they painted, and they sung, and they danced, and they drank as they went along, not so much because they all cared for these things, or had any real joy in them — as because this restless activity served to divert their attention from ever being fixed on the “dark and shadowy valley”.

The King, who knew the thoughtless temper of the travelers, and how apt they were to forget their journey’s end, had thought of a thousand little kind attentions to *warn* them of their dangers. The King caused to be written and posted, before the eyes of the travelers, several little notices and cautions, such as, “Broad is the way that leads to destruction!” “Take heed, lest you also perish!” “Woe to them that rise up early to drink wine!” “The pleasures of sin are but for a season!”

Such were the notices directed to the “Broad-way” travelers; but they were so busily engaged in plucking the flowers, sometimes before they were full-blown, and in devouring the fruits, often before they were ripe, and in loading themselves with “yellow clay”, under the weight of which millions perished — that they had no time so much as to look at the King’s directions.

Many went wrong because they preferred a merry journey to a safe one, and because they were terrified by certain notices chiefly intended for the “Narrow-way” travelers, such as, “You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice.” But had these foolish people allowed themselves time or patience to read to the end, which they seldom would do, they would have seen these comfortable words added: “But your sorrow shall be turned into joy;” also, “Your joy no man takes from you;” and, “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.”

Now I also saw in my dream, that many travelers who had a strong dread of ending at the land of Misery, walked up to the Strait gate, hoping, that though the entrance was narrow, yet if they could once get in, the road would widen; but what was their grief, when on looking more closely they saw written on the inside, “Narrow is the way!” this frightened them.

They compared the inscriptions with which the whole way was lined, such as, “Be not conformed to this world!” “Deny yourselves, take up your cross” — with all the tempting pleasures of the wilderness.

Some indeed recollected the fine descriptions they had read of the Happy land, the Golden city, and the river of Pleasures. But then, those joys were distant, and from the faintness of their light they soon got to think that what was remote, might be uncertain; and while the present good increased in bulk by its nearness — the distant good receded, diminished, disappeared. Their faith failed; they would trust no farther than they could see — they drew back and got into the Broad Way, taking a common but sad refuge in the number and gaiety of their companions.

When these faint-hearted people turned back, their light was quite put out, and then they became worse than those who had made no attempt to get in!

A few honest, humble travelers, not naturally stronger than the rest, but strengthened by their trust in the King’s word, came up by the light of their lamps, and meekly entered in at the Strait gate. As they advanced farther they felt less heavy, and though the way did not in reality grow wider — yet they grew reconciled to the narrowness of it, especially when they saw the walls here and there studded with certain jewels called “promises”, such as, “He who endures to the end shall be saved;” and, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Some, when they were almost ready to faint, were encouraged by seeing that many niches in the Narrow-way were filled with statues and pictures of saints and martyrs, who had borne their testimony at the stake, that the Narrow-way was the safe way. And these travelers, instead of sinking at the sight of the gallows, the sword and the furnace, were animated by these words written under them: “Those who wear white robes came out of great tribulation!” and, “Be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

In the meantime there came a great multitude of travelers, all from *Laodicea*. This was the largest party I had yet seen; these were neither cold nor hot. They would not give up future hope — and they could not endure the difficult and narrow way. So they contrived to deceive themselves by imagining, that though they resolved to keep the Happy land in view — yet there must needs be many different ways which led to it, no doubt all equally sure without being all equally difficult and narrow. So they set on foot certain little contrivances to attain the end without using the means, and softened down the spirit of the King’s directions, to fit them to their own practice.

Sometimes they would split a direction in two, and only use that half which suited them. For instance, when they met with the following rule, “Trust in the Lord, and do good,” they would take the first half, and make themselves easy with a general sort of trust, that through the mercy of the King, all would go well with them — though they themselves did nothing. And on the other hand, many made sure that a few good works of their own would carry them safely to the Happy land, though they did “not” trust in the Lord, nor place any faith in his word — so they took the second half of the spliced direction. Thus some perished by a *lazy faith*, and others by a *working pride*.

A large party of *Pharisees* now appeared, who had so neglected their lamp that they did not see their way at all, though they imagined themselves to be full of light. They *kept up appearances* so well as to delude others, and most effectually to delude themselves with a notion that they might be found in the right way at last. In this dreadful delusion they went on to the end, and until they were finally plunged into the dark valley, never discovered the horrors which awaited them on the dismal shore!

It was remarkable, that while these Pharisees were often boasting how bright their light burned, in order to get the praise of men — the humble travelers, whose steady light showed their good works to others, refused all commendation, and the brighter their light shined before men, so much the more they insisted that they ought to boast, not in themselves, but their Father who is in Heaven.

I now set myself to observe what was the particular hindrance which obstructed particular travelers in their endeavors to enter in at the Strait gate. I remarked a huge portly man, who seemed desirous of getting in, but he carried about him such a vast provision of bags full of gold, and had on so many rich garments which stuffed him out so wide, that though he pushed and squeezed like one who had really a mind to get in — yet he could not possibly do so. Then I heard a voice crying, “Woe to him that loads himself with thick clay.” The poor man felt something was wrong, and even went so far as to change some of his more cumbersome vanities into others which seemed less bulky; but still he and his pack were much too wide for the narrow gate.

He would not, however, give up the matter so easily, but began to throw away a little of the coarser part of his baggage; but still I remarked, that he threw away none of the vanities which lay near his heart. He tried again, but it would not do; still his dimensions were too large. He now looked up and read these words: “How hard it is for those who have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” The poor man sighed to find that it was impossible to enjoy his fill of both worlds, and “went away sorrowing.”

If he ever afterwards cast a thought towards the Happy land, it was only to regret that the road which led to it was too narrow to admit any but the meager children of poverty, who were not so encumbered by wealth as to be too big for the passage. Had he read on, he would have seen that “with God all things are possible.”

Another advanced with much confidence of success — for having little worldly riches or honors, the gate did not seem so strait to him. He got to the threshold triumphantly, and seemed to look back with disdain on all that he was leaving. He soon found, however, that he was so *bloated with pride*, and *stuffed out with self-sufficiency*, that he could not get in. Nay, he was in a worse way than the rich man just named, for he was willing to throw away some of his outward luggage — whereas this man refused to part with a grain of that vanity and self-applause which made him too big for the way. The sense of his own worth so swelled him out, that he stuck fast in the gateway, and could neither get in nor out.

Finding now that he must cut off all those big thoughts of himself, if he wished to be reduced to such a size as to pass the gate — he gave up all thoughts of it. He scorned that humility and self-denial which might have shrunk him down to the proper dimensions. The more he insisted on his own qualifications for entrance — the more impossible it became to enter, for the bigger he grew! Finding that he must become quite another manner of man before he could hope to get in — he gave up the desire. And I now saw, that though when he set his face towards the Happy land he could not get an inch forward — yet the instant he made a motion to turn back into the world, his speed became rapid enough, and he got back into the Broad Way much sooner than he had got out of it.

Many, who for a time were brought down from their usual bulk by some affliction, seemed to get in with ease. They now thought all their difficulties over; for having been surfeited with the world during their late disappointment, they turned their backs upon it willingly enough. A fit of sickness perhaps, had for a time brought their bodies into subjection, so that they were enabled just to get in at the gateway; but as soon as health and spirits returned, the way grew narrower and narrower to them — they could not get on, but turned quickly, and got back into the world.

I saw many attempt to enter who were stopped short by a large burden of worldly cares — others by a load of idolatrous attachments. But I observed that nothing proved a more complete bar, than that vast bundle of *prejudices* with which multitudes were loaded. Others were fatally obstructed by loads of *bad habits* which they would not lay down, though they knew they prevented their entrance.

Some few, however, of most descriptions who had kept their light alive by craving constant supplies from the King's treasury — got through at last by a strength which they felt not to be their own.

One poor man, who carried the largest bundle of bad habits I had seen, could not get on a step. He never ceased, however, to implore for light enough to see where his misery lay. He threw down one of his bundles, then another, but all to little purpose, still he could not stir. At last, striving as if in agony — which is the true way of entering — he threw down the heaviest article in his pack — this was *selfishness*. The poor fellow felt relieved at once, his light burned brightly, and the rest of his pack was as nothing.

Then I heard a great noise as of *carpenters* at work. I looked to see what this might be, and saw many sturdy travelers, who, finding they were too bulky to get through, took into their heads not to reduce themselves, but to *widen the gate!* They hacked on this side, and hewed on that side — but all their hacking and hewing and hammering was to no purpose, they got only their labor for their pains. It would have been possible for them to have reduced themselves — but to widen the Narrow Way was impossible.

What grieved me most was, to observe that many who had got on successfully a good way, now stopped to rest, and to admire their own progress. While they were thus valuing themselves on their attainment, their light diminished. While these were boasting how far they had left others behind, who had set out much earlier, some slower travelers, whose beginning had not been so promising but who had walked circumspectly, now outstripped them.

These last walked, “not as though they had already attained,” but “this one thing they did, forgetting the things which were behind, they pressed forward towards the mark for the prize of their high calling.” These, though naturally weak, yet by “laying aside every weight, finished the race that was before them.”

Those who had kept their “light burning,” who were not “wise in their own conceit,” who “laid their help on One that is mighty,” who had “chosen to suffer affliction rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” — came at length to the Happy land. They had indeed the dark and shadowy valley to cross; but even there they found “a rod and a staff” to comfort them. Their light, instead of being put out by the damps of the valley of the Shadow of Death, often burned with added brightness.

Some, indeed, suffered the terrors of a short eclipse; but even then their light, like that of a dark lantern, was not put out, it was only hid for a while — and even these often finished their course with joy.

But be that as it might, the instant they reached the Happy land, all tears were wiped from their eyes. And the King himself came forth and welcomed them into his presence, and put a crown upon their heads, with these words: “*Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!*”