

The Rainbow in the Clouds

By
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“When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will be seen in the clouds” Genesis 9:14

1. SOVEREIGNTY

“The Lord Reigns.” Psalm 93:1

No rainbow of promise in the “dark and cloudy day” shines more radiantly than this. God, my God, the God who gave Jesus, orders all events, and overrules all for my good! “When I,” says He, “send clouds over the earth.” He has no wish to conceal the hand which shadows for a time earth’s brightest prospects. It is He alike who “brings the cloud”, who brings us into it, and in mercy leads us through it! His kingdom rules over all. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” He puts the burden on, and keeps it on, and at His own time will remove it! Beware of brooding over second causes. It is the worst form of atheism! When our most fondly cherished gourds are smitten; our fairest flowers lie withered in our bosom; this is the silencer of all reflections— “The Lord prepared the worm!” When the temple of the soul is smitten with lightning, and its pillars rent: “The Lord is in His holy temple!” Accident, chance, fate, destiny, have no place in the Christian’s creed. He is no unpiloted vessel left to the mercy of the storm. “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters!” There is but one explanation of all that befalls him: “I will be dumb, I will open not my mouth, because You did it.” Death seems to the human spectator, the most capricious and severe of all events. But not so. The keys of death and Hades are in the hands of this same reigning God! Look at the parable of the fig-tree. Its prolonged existence, or its doom as a cumberer, forms matter of conversation in heaven; the axe cannot be laid at its root until God gives the warrant! How much more will this be the case regarding every “Tree of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord?” It will be watched over by Him, “Lest anyone hurt it.” Every trembling fiber He will care for; and if made early to succumb to the inevitable stroke, “Who knows not in all these things, that the hand of the Lord has wrought this.” Be it mine to merge my own will in His; not to cavil at His ways, or to seek to have one jot or tittle of His will altered; but to lie passive in His hands; to take the bitter as well as the sweet, knowing that the bitter cup is mingled by One who loves me too well to add one ingredient that might have been spared! Who can wonder that the sweet Psalmist of Israel should seek, as he sees it spanning the lower heavens, to fix the arrested gaze of a whole world on the softened tints of this Rainbow of Comfort, “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice.”

2. A LOVING PURPOSE

“The Lord has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.” Psalm 35:27

What is “prosperity?” Is it threads of life weaved into a bright outcome? a full cup? ample riches? worldly applause? an unbroken circle? No, these are often a snare; received without gratitude; dimming the soul to its nobler destinies. Often spiritually it rather means God taking us by the hand into the lowly Valleys of Humiliation; leading us as He did his servant Job of old; out of his sheep, oxen, camels, health, wealth, children; in order that we may be brought before Him in the dust, and say, “Blessed be His holy name!”

Yes! The very reverse of what is known in the world as Prosperity (generally) forms the background on which the Rainbow of Promise is seen. God smiles on us through these rainbows and teardrops of sorrows! He loves us too well. He has too great an interest in our spiritual welfare to permit us to live on in what is misnamed “Prosperity.” When He sees duties languidly performed, or coldly neglected; the heart deadened, and love to Himself congealed by the absorbing power of the present world, He puts a thorn in our nest to drive us to the wing, and prevent our being grovelers forever!

I may not be able now to understand the mystery of these dealings. I may be asking through the tears, “Why this unkind arrest on my earthly happiness? Why so premature a lopping of my boughs of promise? Such a speedy withering of my most cherished gourd?” The answer is plain. It is your soul’s prosperity He has in view. Believe it, your true Ebenezers will yet be raised close by your Zarephaths (the place of furnace).

His afflictions are no arbitrary appointments. There is righteous necessity in all He does. As He lays His chastening hand upon you, and leads you by ways you know not, and which you never would have chosen. He whispers the gentle accents in your ear, “Beloved I wish above all things that you would prosper, and be in health.”

Rest in the quiet consciousness that all is well. Murmur at nothing which brings you nearer His own loving Presence. Be thankful for your very cares, because you can confidently cast them all upon Him. He has your temporal and eternal “prosperity” too much at heart to appoint one superfluous pang, one needless stroke. Commit therefore, all that concerns you to His keeping, and leave it there.

3. THE SAFE REFUGE

“A man shall be a shelter from the wind; and a refuge from the storm; like streams of water in the desert; and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.” Isaiah 32:2

“A man!” This first word forms the key to the precious verse, It is “The man Christ Jesus!” And when and where is He thus revealed to His people as their hiding place and shelter? It is, as with Elijah of old, in the whirlwind and the storm! Amid the world’s bright sunshine, in the tranquil skies, uninterrupted prosperity, they seek Him not! But when the clouds begin to gather, and the sun is swept from the firmament; when they have learned the insecurity of all earthly refuges, then the prayer ascends, “My heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” The Earthquake, the Tempest, the Fire, and then “the still small voice!” Sorrowing believer, you have indeed a Sure Refuge; a Strong Tower which cannot be shaken! The world has its refuges too. But they cannot stand the day of trial. The wind passes over them and they are gone! But the louder the hurricane, the more will it endear to you the abiding Shelter; the deeper in the clefts of this ROCK, the safer you are.

A Man! Delight often to dwell on the humanity of Jesus; you have a brother on the throne! a “living Kinsman,” one who “knows your frame,” and who, by the exquisite sympathies of His exalted human nature, can gauge, as none other can, the depths of your sorrow.

An earthly friend comes to you in trial, he has never known bereavement, and therefore can not enter into your woe. Another comes; he has been again and again in the furnace; his heart has been touched tenderly as your own; he can feelingly sympathize with you. It is so with Jesus. As man, He has passed through every experience of suffering. He has Himself known the storm from which He offers you shelter. He is the ROCK, yet “a Man!” “Mighty to save;” yet mighty to compassionate! “Emmanuel, God with us!” He is like the rainbow in the material heavens, which, while its summit is in the clouds, each base of its arc rests on earth; or like the oak which, while it can wrestle with the tempest, yet invites the most feeble bird to fold its wing on its branches!

Mourner! Go sit under your “Beloved’s shadow with great delight.” Hide in His wounded side! The hand which pierced you is ordering your trials; He who roused the storm is the hiding place from it; and as you journey on, gloomy clouds mustering around you, let this bright rainbow of comfort ever arrest your drooping eye; “For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way... since He Himself has gone through suffering and temptation, He is able to help us when we are being tempted.”

4. THE REASON FOR CHASTISEMENT

“Whom the Lord loves He chastens.” Hebrews 12:6

What! God loves me when He is discharging His quiver upon me! emptying me from vessel to vessel! causing the sun of my earthly joys to set in clouds? Yes! O afflicted, tossed with tempest; He chastens you because He loves you! This trial comes from His own tender, loving hand; His own tender, unchanging heart!

Are you laid on a sickbed; are sorrowful months and wearisome nights appointed unto you? Let this be the pillow on which your aching head reclines. It is because He loves me!

Is it bereavement that has swept your heart and desolated your dwelling? He appointed that chamber of death, because He loves you! As it is the suffering child of the family which claims a mother’s deepest affections and most tender solicitude, so have you at this moment embarked on your side the most tender love and solicitude of a heavenly Father. He loved you into this sorrow, and will love you through it. There is nothing capricious in His

dealings. LOVE is the reason of all He does. There is no drop of wrath in that cup you are called to drink. "I do believe," says one, "He has purchased these afflictions for us, as well as everything else. Blessed be His name, it is part of His covenant to visit us with the rod." What says our adorable Lord himself? The words were spoken, not when He was on earth, a sojourner in a sorrowing world, but when enthroned amid the glories of heaven. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." (Revelation 3:19)

Believer! rejoice in the thought that the rod, the chastening rod, is in the hands of the living, loving Savior, who died for you! Tribulation is the King's Highway and yet that highway is paved with love. As some flowers before shedding their fragrance require to be crushed, so does your God think it suitable to bruise you. As some birds are said to sing their sweetest notes when the thorn pierces their bosom, so does He appoint affliction to lacerate, that you may be driven to the wing, singing, in your upward soaring, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed!"

Be it ours to say, "Lord, I will love You not only despite Your rod, but because of your rod." I will rush into the very arms that are chastening me!

5. IMMUTABILITY

"I the Lord change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." Malachi 3:6

The Unchangeableness of God. What an anchor for a storm tossed sea! "Change is our portion here!" Scenes are altering. Joys are fading. Friends! some of them are removed at a distance; others have gone to their 'long home'. Who, amid these checkered experiences, does not sigh for something permanent, stable, enduring? The vessel has again and again slipped its earthly moorings. We long for some secure and sheltered harbor.

"I change not!" Heart and flesh may faint; yes, do faint and fail but there is an unfainting, unyielding, unvarying God. All the changes in the world around cannot affect Him. Our own fitfulness cannot alter Him. When we are depressed, downcast, fluctuating, our treacherous hearts turning aside "like a broken bow," He is without one "shadow of turning." "God who cannot lie," is the superscription on His eternal throne; and inscribed on all His dealings.

"I change not!" Precious name! It forms a blessed guarantee that nothing can befall me but what is for my good. I cannot doubt His faithfulness. I dare not arraign the rectitude of His dispensations. It is covenant love which is now darkening my earthly horizon. This hour He is the same as when He "spared not His own Son!" Oh, instead of wondering at my trials, let me rather wonder that He has borne with me so long. It is of the Lord's unchanging mercies that I am not consumed. Had He been man, changeable, vacillating, as myself, long before now would He have spurned me away, and consigned me to the doom of the cumberer. But, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord." He is without any variableness.

6. DIVINE SYMPATHY

"I know their sorrows." Exodus 3:7

Man cannot say so. There are many sensitive fibers in the soul the best and most tender human sympathy cannot touch. But the Prince of Sufferers, He who led the way in the path of sorrow, "knows our frame." When crushing bereavement lies like ice on the heart, when the dearest earthly friend cannot enter into the peculiarities of our grief, Jesus can, Jesus does! He who once bore my sins also carried my sorrows.

That eye, now on the throne, was once dim with weeping! I can think in all my afflictions, "He was afflicted," in all my tears, "Jesus wept."

"I know their sorrows!" He may seem at times thus to forget and forsake us; leaving us to utter the plaintive cry, "Has God forgotten to be gracious," when all the while He is bending over us in the most tender love. He often allows our needs to attain their extremity, that He may stretch forth His succoring hand, and reveal the plenitude of His Grace! "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

And "knowing" our sorrows, is a guarantee that none will be sent but what He sees to be needful. "I will not," says He, "make a full end of you, but I will correct you in measure." (Jer. 30:11) All He sends is precisely meted out; wisely apportioned. There is nothing accidental or fortuitous; no unneeded thorn; no superfluous pang. He "puts our tears in a bottle." (Psalm 61:8) Each one is counted, drop by drop, tear by tear, they are sacred things

among the treasures of God! Suffering believer, the iron may have entered deeply into your soul; yet rejoice! Great is your honor; you are partaker with Christ in His sufferings. Jesus a sorrowing, sympathizing Jesus, “knows” your aching pangs and burning tears, and He will “come down to deliver you!”

7. A GRACIOUS CONDITION

“If need be.” 1 Peter 1:6

What a blessed motto and superscription over the dark lintels of sorrow! “If need be!” Every sharp arrow from the quiver of God is feathered with it! Write it, child of affliction, over every trial your God sees fit to send! If He calls you down from the sunny mountain heights to the dark glades, hear Him saying, “There is a need be.” If He has dashed the cup of prosperity from your lips, curtailed your creature comforts, diminished your “basket and your store,” hear Him saying, “There is a need be.” If He has ploughed and furrowed your soul with severe bereavement; extinguished light after light in your dwelling; hear Him therefore stilling the tumult of your grief “there is a need be.” Yes! believe it, there is some profound reason for your trial, which at present may be indiscernible. No furnace will be hotter than He sees to be needed.

Sometimes indeed, His teachings are mysterious. We can with difficulty spell out the letters, “God is love!” We can see no “bright light,” in “our cloud.” It is all mystery; not one break is there in the sky! No! “Hear what God the Lord speaks.” “If need be.”

He does not long leave His people alone, if He sees the chariot wheels dragging heavily. He will take His own means to sever them from an absorbing love of the world; to pursue them out of self; and dislodge usurping clay idols that may have vaulted on the throne which He alone may occupy. Before your present trial He may have seen your love waxing cold, or your influence for good lessening. As the sun puts out the fire, the sun of earthly prosperity may have been extinguishing the fires of your soul. You may have been shining less brightly for Christ, effecting some guilty compromise with an insinuating and seductive world. He has appointed the very discipline and dealing needful; nothing less could have done!

Be still, and know that He is God! That “need be,” remember, is in the hands of Infinite Love, Infinite Wisdom, Infinite Power. Trust Him in little things as well as great things, in trifles as well as emergencies.

Seek to have unquestioning faith. Though other paths, doubtless, would have been selected by you had the choice been in your hands, be it yours to listen to His voice at every turn in the road, saying, “This is the way, walk in it.” We may not be able to understand it now, but one day we shall come to find, that AFFLICTION is one of God’s blessed angels; a ministering spirit, “sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation.” Lovelier, indeed, to the eye, is the azure blue; the fleecy summer vapors, or gold and vermilion of western sunsets. But what would become of the earth if no dark clouds from time to time hung over it; distilling their treasures, reviving and refreshing its drooping vegetable tribes?

Is it otherwise with the soul? No. The cloud of sorrow is needed. Its every raindrop has an inner meaning of LOVE! If, even now, afflicted one, these clouds are gathering, and the tempest sighing, lift up your eye to the divine scroll gleaming in the darkened heavens, and remember that He who has put the Rainbow of promise there, saw also a “need be” for the cloud on which it rests!

8. PRESENCE AND REST

“My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” Exodus 33:14

Moses asked to be shown “the way.” Here is the answer: The way is not shown; but better than this, God says, “Trust Me, I will go with you!” Afflicted one! hear the voice addressing you from the cloudy pillar. It is a wilderness promise which “the God of Jeshurun” speaks to His spiritual Israel still. He who led His people of old “like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron,” will manifest towards you the same Shepherd love. The way may be very different from what we could have wished; what we would have chosen. But the choice is in better hands. He had His own wise and righteous ends in every devious turning in it.

Who can look back on the past leadings of God without gratitude and thankfulness? When His sheep have been conducted to the rougher parts of the wilderness, He, their Shepherd, has “gone before them. When their fleece was torn, and footsore and weary, He has borne them in His arms. His presence has lightened every cross and

sweetened every care. Let us trust Him for an unknown and checkered future. Other companionships we cherished may have failed us, but One who is better than the best, goes before us in His gracious pillar cloud. With Him for our portion, take what He will away, we must be happy; we can rise above the loss of the earthly gift, in the consciousness of the nobler possession and heritage we enjoy in the Great Bestower. He may have seen fit to level clay idols, that He, the All Satisfying might reign paramount and supreme. He may have seen to take earthly “presences” away, to give us to breathe more earnestly the prayer “If YOUR presence go not with us, carry us not hence.” He will not allow us to rear havens on earth, and to write upon them, “This is my rest.” No-‘tenting time’ here; resting time yonder! But “Fear not,” He seems to say “You are not left without a friend or without solace on the way Pilgrim in a pilgrim land! ‘My presence shall go with you.’ In all your dark and cloudy days; in your hours of faintness and depression; in sadness; in life and in death! And when the journey is ended, the Pillar needed no more, ‘I will give you rest’.”

The pledge of Grace will be followed with the fruition of Glory!

9. THE GIVER AND THE TAKER

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job1:21

Noble posture this; to kneel and to adore! To see no hand but ONE! Sabians; Fire; Whirlwind; Sword; are all overlooked. The Patriarch recognizes alone “The Lord” who gave and “The Lord” who has taken. What is the cause of so much depression, needless sorrow, ungodly murmuring in our hours of trial? It was what Rutherford calls “our looking to the confused rollings of the wheels of second causes;” a refusal to rise to “the height of the great argument,” and confidently to say, “The will of the Lord be done!” a refusal to hear His voice; His own loving voice, mingling with the accents of the rudest storm; “It is I!” “Is there evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it?” Is there a bitter drop in the cup, and the Lord has not mingled it? He loves His people too well to intrust their interest to any other. We are but clay in the hand of the Potter; vessels in the hand of the Refiner of silver. He metes out our portion. He appoints the bounds of our habitation. “The Lord God prepared the gourd.” “The Lord God prepared the worm.” He is the Author alike of mercies and sorrows, of comforts and crosses. He breathes into our nostrils the breath of life; and it is at His summons the spirit returns “to the God who gave it!”

Oh, that we would seek to regard our own lives and the lives of those dear to us as a loan. God, as the Great Proprietor, Who, when He sees fit, can revoke the grant or curtail the lease He gave! All mercies by Him bestowed; by Him continued; by Him withheld.

And how often does He take away, that He may Himself enter the vacuum of the heart and fill it with His own ineffable presence and love! No loss can compensate for the lack of Him, but He can compensate for all losses. Let us trust His love and faithfulness as a taking as well as a giving God. Often are Sense and Sight tempted to say, “Not so, Lord!” But Faith, resting on the promise, can exult in this Rainbow spanning the darkest cloud, “Even so, Father, for it seems good in your sight!”

10. DELIVERANCE IN TROUBLE

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.” Psalm 50:15

How varied are our days of trouble! Sickness, with its hours of restlessness and languor. Bereavement, with its rifled treasures and aching hearts. Loss of substance; the curtailment or forfeiture of worldly possessions; riches taking to themselves wings and fleeing away; or, severer than all, the wounds from friends; abused confidence; withered affections; hopes scattered like the leaves of autumn!

But “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Tried one! He leaves not your defenseless head unsheltered in the storm. “Call upon Me!” He invites you into the pavilion of His presence! Better the bitter Marah waters with His healing, than the purest fountain of the world, and no God! Better the hottest furnace flames with one there “like the Son of God,” than that the dross should be allowed to accumulate, and the soul left to cleave to the dust! He, “the purifier of silver,” is seated by these flames, tempering their fury! Yes, He gives the special promise, “I will deliver you.” It may not be the deliverance we expect; the deliverance we have prayed for; the deliverance we could have wished. But shall not the most severe trial be well worth enduring, if this be the result of His chastening love; “You will glorify Me.” “Glorify Him!” How? By a simple unreasoning

faith; by meek, lowly, un murmuring acquiescence in His dealing; these dealings endearing the Savior and His grace more than ever to our hearts.

The day of trouble led His saints in all ages to glorify Him. David never could have written his touching Psalms, nor Paul his precious epistles, had not God cast them both into the crucible. To be teachers of the Church of the future, they had to graduate in the school of affliction. If He is appointing similar discipline, let it be our endeavor to glorify Him by active obedience, as well as passive resignation; not abandoning ourselves to selfish, moody, sentimental grief; but rather going forth on our great mission; our work and warfare; with a vaster estimate of the value of time, and the grandeur of existence. "Give glory to the Lord your God before He cause darkness; and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and, while you look for light, He turned it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness!"

11. PITYING LOVE

"Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Psalm 103:13

"Abba, Father!" is a Gospel word. A father bending over the sick bed of his weak or dying child; a mother pressing, in tender solitude, an infant sufferer to her bosom. These are the earthly pictures of God. "As a father pities." "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you!"

When tempted in our season of overwhelming sorrow to say, "Never has there been so dark a cloud, never a heart so stripped and desolate as mine," let this thought hush every murmur, "It is your Father's good pleasure!" The love and pity of the most tender parent is but a dim shadow compared to the pitying love of God. If your heavenly Father's smile has for a moment been exchanged for the chastening rod; be assured there is some deep necessity for the altered discipline. If there be unutterable yearnings in the soul of the earthly parent as the lancet is applied to the body of his child; infinitely more is it so with your covenant God as He subjects you to those deep wounds of heart! Finite wisdom has no place in His ordinations. An earthly father may err; is ever erring; but "as for God His way is perfect." This is the explanation of His every dealing: "Your heavenly Father knows you have need of all these things!"

Trust His heart when you cannot trace His ways. Do not try to penetrate the cloud which "He brings over the earth," and to look through it. Keep your eye steadily fixed on the rainbow. The mystery is God's, the promise is yours. Seek that the end of all His dispensations may be to make you more confiding. Without one misgiving commit your way to Him. He says regarding each child of His covenant family, what He said of Ephraim of old (and never more so than in a season of suffering) "I do earnestly remember him still." While now bending your head like a bulrush; your heart breaking with sorrow; remember His pitying eye is upon you. Be it yours, even through blinding tears, to say, "Even so Father!"

12. THE BLESSED HOPE

"That blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Titus 2:1

What a bright rainbow for a storm-wreathed sky! Hope is a joyous emotion! Poetry sings of it; music warbles its lofty aspirations; but alas! how often does it weave fantastic visions then vanish! "In the morning" the flowers of life are flourishing and growing up; "in the evening" a mysterious blight comes; they lie withered garlands at our feet! The longing apparitions of the whole life seem realized; one wave of calamity overtakes us, and washes all away!

But, there is one "blessed hope" beyond the possibility of blight or decay; "The hope of the glory of God," the "Hope which makes not ashamed;" "the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior!"

If we long on earth for the return of an absent friend or brother, separated from us for a season, by intervening oceans or continent; if we count the weeks or months until we welcome him back again to the parental home, how should the Christian long for the return of the "Brother of brothers," the Friend of friends: "I will come again," is His own gracious promise, "To receive you unto Myself!" Oh happy day! when He shall be "glorified in His saints;" when His people will suffer no more, and sin no more. No more couches of sickness, or aching hearts; or fevered brows; no more opened graves, or bitter tears; and, better than all, no more guilty estrangements and traitorous unholy hearts! It will be the bridal day of the soul. The body slumbering in the dust

will be reunited a glorified body to a redeemed spirit. The grave shall be forever spoiled; death swallowed up in eternal victory. "So shall we be forever with the Lord."

Reader, do you "love His appearing?" Are you looking with eager expectant attitude of those who are "looking for, and hastening unto the coming of God." "Yet a little while, and He that shall come, will come!" If you are a child of the covenant, having conscious filial nearness to the Throne of grace, you need not dread the Throne of glory! True, He is the "great God," but He is "our Savior." It is a "Kinsman Redeemer" who is ordained to "judge the world in righteousness." Yes! turn your eye oftener towards this bright Rainbow spanning a glorious future; for remember, it is "to them who look for Him," that He shall "appear the second time without sin unto salvation!"

13. A GRACIOUS REMOVAL

"The righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace! They shall rest in their beds." Isaiah 57:1-2

How this thought reconciles to earth's saddest separations! The early (what we are apt to think the too early) graves of our "loved and lost," have saved them from much sorrow, much suffering, much sin! Who can tell what may have been brooding in a dark horizon? The fairest vessel; the life freighted with the greatest promise; might have been made shipwreck on this world's treacherous sea. My God knows what is best. If He plucked His lily soon, it was to save it some rough blast. If He early folded His lamb, it was to save it having its fleece soiled with earthly corruption. If the port of glory was soon entered, it was because He foresaw the threatening tempests that screened from our limited vision; "So He brought them to the haven where they would be!"

Yes! the quiet haven! The storms of life are over! That shore is undisturbed by one murmuring wave. "He shall enter into peace!" the rest which "remains!" Did the ransomed dead, at the hour of their departure, sink into blank oblivion; inherit everlasting silence, sad indeed would be the pangs of separation. But, "weep not, she is not dead, but sleeps." Yes! weep not! She is not dead but lives! At the very moment earth's tears are falling, the spirit is sunning in the realms of everlasting day, safely housed, safely home! The body "rests in its bed." The grave is its couch of repose! We bid it the long "good night" in the joyful expectancy of a glorious reunion at the waking time of immortality; the "morning without clouds," whose "sun shall no more go down."

Child of sorrow! mourning over the withdrawal of some beloved object of earthly affection. Dry your tears. An early death has been an early crown! The tie sundered here links you to the throne of God. You have a brother, sister, a child in heaven! You are the relatives of a ransomed saint! We are proud when we hear of our friends being "advanced" in this world. What are the world's noblest promotions in comparison with that of the believer at death, when he graduates from grace to glory? When he exchanges the pilgrim warfare for eternal rest?

Often, in your hours of sadness, contrast the certainty of present bliss, with the possibilities of a suffering, sorrowing, sinning future; the joys in possession, with the evils which might have been in life. You may now, like the Shunnamite of old, be gazing with tearful eye on some withered blossom, but when the question is put, "Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?" in the elevating confidence that they have "entered into peace," and are "resting in their beds," be it yours joyfully to answer, "It is well."

14. UNVEILED MYSTERIES

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." John 13:7

Much is baffling and perplexing to us in God's present dealings. "What!" we are often ready to exclaim, "could not the cup have been less bitter; the trial less severe; the road less dreary?" "Hush your misgivings," says a gracious God; "arraign not the rectitude of My dispensations. You shall yet see all revealed and made bright in the mirror of eternity!"

"What I am doing" -it is all my doing, my appointment. You have partial view of these dealings; they are seen by the eye of sense through a dim and distorted medium. You can see nothing but plans crossed, and gourds laid low, and "beautiful rods" broken. But I see the end from the beginning. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

“Later you will understand!” Wait for the “later” revelation! An earthly father puzzles not the ear of infancy with hard sayings and involved problems. He waits for the manhood of being and then unfolds all. So it is with God! We are now in our infancy; children lisping in earthly infancy a knowledge of His ways. We shall learn the “deep things of God.” in the manhood of eternity! Christ now often shows himself only “behind the lattice,” a glimpse and He is gone! But the day is coming when we shall “see Him as He is!” when every dark hieroglyphic in the Roll of Providence will be interpreted and expounded! It is unfair to criticize the half finished picture; to censure or condemn the half developed plan. God’s plans are here in embryo. “We see,” says Rutherford, “the broken links in the chain of His providence. Let the Molder work his own clay in whatever frame He pleases.” But a flood of light will break upon us from the sapphire throne; “In your light, O God! we shall see light.” The “need be,” muffled as a secret now, will be confided to us then, and become luminous with love.

Perhaps we may not have to wait until eternity for the realization of this promise. We may experience its fulfillment here. We not infrequently find, even in this present world, mysterious dispensations issuing in unlooked for blessings. Jacob would never have seen Joseph had he not parted with Benjamin. Often would the believer never would have seen the true Joseph had he not been called on to part with his best beloved! His language at the time is that of the patriarch “I am indeed bereaved!” “All these things are against me!” But the things he imagined to be so adverse, have proved the means of leading him to see the heavenly king “in His beauty” before he dies. Much is sent to “humble us and to prove us.” It may not do us good now, but it is promised to do so “at our latter end.”

I shall not dictate to my God what His way should be. The patient does not dictate to the physician. He does not reject and refuse the prescription because it is nauseous; he knows it is for his good, and takes it on trust. It is for faith to repose in whatever God appoints. Let me not wrong His love or dishonor His faithfulness by supposing that there is one needless or redundant drop in the cup which His loving wisdom has mingled. “Now we know in part, but THEN shall we know even as also we are known!”

15. THE CHOOSING PLACE

“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Isaiah 48:10

The Furnace of Affliction! It is God’s meeting place with His people. “I have chosen you,” says He, “in the furnace of affliction. I will keep you there, until the purifying process is complete; and if need be, in a ‘chariot of fire’ I will carry you to heaven!” Some fires are for destruction, but this is for purification. He, the Refiner, is sitting by the furnace regulating the flames, tempering the heat; not the least filing of the gold but what is precious to Him! The bush is burning with fire, but He is in the middle of it; a living God in a bush; a living Savior in the furnace! And has this not been the method of His dealing with His faithful people in every age. First, trial; then blessing. First, difficulties; then, deliverances. Egyptian plagues— darkness, brick kilns, the Red Sea, forty years of desert privations; then Canaan! First, the burning fiery furnace; then the vision of “one like the Son of God!” Or, as with Elijah on Carmel, the answer is first by fire, and then by rain. First, the fiery trial, then the gentle descent of the Spirit’s influences, coming down like “rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.”

Believer! be it yours to ask, “are my trials sanctified?” Are they making me holier, purer, better, more meek, more gentle, more heavenly minded, more Savior like? Seek to “glorify God in the fires.” Patience is a grace which the angels cannot manifest. It is a flower of earth; it blooms not in Paradise; it requires tribulation for its exercise; it is nurtured only amid wind, and hail, and storm. By patient, uncomplaining submission, remember, you, a poor sinner, can thus magnify God in a way the loftiest angelic natures cannot do! He is taking you to the inner chambers of His covenant faithfulness. His design is to purge away your dross, to bring you forth from the furnace reflecting His own image, and fitted for glory! Those intended for great usefulness are much in the refining pot. “His children,” says Romaine, “have found suffering times happy times. They never have such nearness to their Father, such holy freedom with Him, and such heavenly refreshment with Him, as under the cross!” Beloved! “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you . . . but rejoice!”

16. MOURNING ENDED

“The days of your mourning shall be ended.” Isaiah 9:20

The believer has “mourning days.” The place of his sojourn is a valley of tears. Adam went weeping from his paradise, we go weeping on the way to ours. But, pilgrim of grief! your tears are numbered. A few more aching sighs; a few more gloomy clouds; and the eternal sun shall burst on you, whose radiance shall never more be obscured! Life may be to you one long “Valley of Baca” a protracted scene of “weeping!” but soon shall you hear the sweet chimes wafted from the towers of the new Jerusalem, “Enter in to the joy of your Lord!” “The Lord God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces!”

“The days of your mourning!” It is a consoling thought that all these days are appointed; meted out; numbered. “Unto you it is given,” says the apostle, “to suffer!” Yes! and if you are a child of the covenant, your mourning days are days of special privilege, intended to be fraught with blessing. To the unbeliever, they are pledges of everlasting woe; to the believer, they are preludes and precursors of eternal glory! Affliction to the one is the cloud without the Rainbow, to the other, it is the cloud radiant and lustrous with gospel promise and gospel hope!

Reader! are you now one of the many members of the family of sorrow? Be comforted! Soon the long night-watch will be over; pain, sickness, weakness, weariness. Soon the windows of the soul will be no more darkened. Soon you shall have nothing to be delivered from, your present losses and crosses will turn into eternal gains, the dews of the night weeping, (nature’s tear-drops) will come to sparkle like beautiful gems in the morning of immortality! Soon the Master’s footsteps will be heard, saying, “The days of your mourning are ended,” and you shall take off your sackcloth, and be girded with gladness.

Up to that moment, your life may have been one long DAY of mourning! but once past the golden portals, and the eye can be dim no more; the very fountain of weeping will be dried! The period of your mourning is counted by DAYS of your eternal rejoicing by eras and cycles! “Why are you then cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? hope in God!” I will gaze through my tears on this celestial rainbow, and sing this “song in the night,” which the God, Who is to wipe my tears away, has put into my lips: “And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away!”

17. THE ABIDING FRIEND

“I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5

No human friend can say so. The closest and dearest of earthly links may be broken, yes! have been broken. Distance may part, time estrange, and the grave separate. Loving earthly looks may only greet you now in mute smiles from the portrait on the wall. But here is an unfainting, unvarying, unfailing Friend. Sorrowing one! amid the wreck of earthly joys which you may be even bewailing, here is a message sent from your God, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you!” Your gourd has withered, but He who gave it you remains! Surrender yourself to His disposal. He wishes to show you His present sufficiency for your happiness. As often your heart in silence and sadness weaves its plaintive lament, “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not!” think of Him who has promised to set “the solitary in families” (Psalm 68:6) and to “give unto them a name and a place better than of sons or of daughters!” Alone! you are not alone! Turn in self-oblivion to Jesus. It is not, it cannot be “night,” if He, “the Sun of your soul,” be ever near! In the morning, He comes with the earliest beam that visits your chamber. When the curtains of night close around you, He, to whom “the darkness and the light are both alike,” is at your side! In the stillness of night, when in your wakeful moments, the visions of the departed flit before you like shadows on the wall, He, the sleepless Shepherd of Israel, is tending your couch, and whispering in your ear, “Fear not, for I am with you!”

Your experience may be that of Paul, “All forsook me!” But, like him, also, you will doubtless, be able to add in the extremity of your sorrow, “Nevertheless, The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me!” He can compensate by His own loving presence, for every earthly loss. Without the consciousness of His friendship and love, the smallest trial will crush you. With Him in your trial, supporting and sustaining you under it, (yes, coming in the place of those you mourn), you will have an infinite and inexhaustible portion, in the place of a finite and mutable one. Many a cloud is there without a Rainbow in Nature; but never in Grace. Every sorrow has its corresponding and counterpart Comfort. “In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, your comforts

have refreshed my soul” (Psalm 94:19). If in the midnight of your grief your earthly sun appears to have set forever, an inner, but not less real sunshine, lights up your stricken heart. The stream of life may have been poisoned at its source, but blessed be His name if it has driven you to say, “All my springs are in YOU!” “The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore will I hope in Him!”

18. UNWILLING DISCIPLINE

“He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” Lamentations 3:33

In our seasons of trial, when under some inscrutable dispensation, how apt is the murmuring thought to rise in our hearts; “All these things are against me!” Might not this overwhelming blow have been spared? Might not this dark cloud which has shadowed my heart and my home with sadness, have been averted? Might not the accompaniments of my trial have been less severe, “Surely the Lord has forgotten to be gracious.” No, these afflictions are errands of mercy in disguise! “He afflicts not willingly.” There is nothing capricious or arbitrary about your God’s dealings. Unutterable tenderness is the character of all His allotments! The world may wound by unkindness; trusted friends may become treacherous; a brother may speak with unnecessary harshness and severity; but the Lord is “abundant in goodness and in truth.” He appoints no needless pang. When he appears like Joseph to “speak roughly,” there are gentle undertones of love. The stern accents are assumed, because He has precious lessons that could not otherwise have been taught!

Ah! be assured there is some deep necessity in all He does. In our calendars of sorrow, we may put this luminous mark against every trying hour, “It was needed!” Some unfruitful branch in the tree required pruning. Some wheat required to be cast overboard to lighten the ship and avert further disaster. Mourning one! He might have dealt far otherwise with you! He might have cut you down as a fruitless, worthless cumberer! He might have abandoned you to drift, disowned and unpiloted on the rocks of destruction. Joined to your idols, He might have left you “alone” to settle on your lees, and forfeit your eternal bliss! But He loved you better. It was kindness, which blighted your fairest blossoms, and hedged up your way with thorns. “Without this hedge of thorns,” says Baxter, “on the right hand and on the left, we would hardly be able to keep the way to heaven.”

We, in our blind unbelief, may speak of trials we imagine might have been spared, chastisements that are unnecessarily severe. But the day is coming when every step of the Lord’s procedure will be vindicated; when we shall own and recognize each separate experience of sorrow to have been an unspeakably precious and important period in the history of the soul. Yes! child of God. The messenger of affliction has an olive-branch in one hand, a love-token plucked from the bowers of paradise; and in the other, a chalice mingled by One too loving and gracious to insert one needless ingredient of sorrow! Remember, every drop of wrath in that cup was exhausted by a surety-Savior. In taking it into your hand, be it yours to extract support and consolation from what so mightily sustained a greater Sufferer in a more awful hour, “This cup which YOU give me to drink, shall I not drink it?”

19. DEATH VANQUISHED

“I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” Rev. 1:18

An enthroned Savior speaks! “I am the Living One”. Others have passed away, but I ever live, and ever love! I am now living! A personal Savior; “Christ your life!” Are you stooping over some treasured house of clay which the whirlwind has made a mass of ruins? I roused the whirlwind from its chamber. I appointed the startling dispensation. I ordered the shroud, and prepared the grave! Let not “accident,” “chance,” or “fate,” enter into the vocabulary of your sorrow. I am the Lord of death as well as of life. I have the keys of “Hell and of the grave” suspended at my belt. The tomb is never unlocked but by Me. Let others talk of the might of the King of Terrors. He has no might but by my permission.

More than this, mourning one! I was “DEAD.” I myself once entered that gloomy portico! I sanctified and consecrated it by my presence! I was a tenant of the tomb. This now glorified body was once laid by human hands in a borrowed grave! Can you dread to walk the Valley trodden by your Lord?; to encounter the “last

enemy,” which He fought and conquered. Death! It has been converted by Him into a “parenthesis in endless life.”

“I am He that was DEAD”; “I Am He who lives.” What more could the Christian desire than this twofold assurance? On the Day of Atonement of old, the blood was sprinkled alike on the mercy seat; the voice of blood arose from the floor below, and the mercy seat above. So it is with the voice of our Elder Brother’s blood. It cried first from earth beneath and now from Heaven. His dying love, is now ever living, imperishable and immutable as His own being!

As the Rainbow in the material firmament can never cease to appear, so long as the present laws of nature continue, and there is a sun in the heavens; so the Rainbow of the Everlasting Covenant, and all its blessings, can only fail when Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, ceases to shine, and ceases to be! With such a Rainbow over-arching the future, one limb resting amid the cloud-lands of life, the other melting its hues into the deeper shadows of the Valley of Death, “I will fear no evil, for You, O SAVIOR GOD, are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.”

20. THE GREATEST GIFT

“Since God did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us all things?” Romans 8:32

These are amazing words! God; the Infinite, God; identifying Himself (so to speak) with the experiences of human sorrow; silencing every murmur with the unanswerable argument “I spared not my own Son. I gave my greatest gift for you; will you not cheerfully surrender your best to Me? Can you refuse after this unspeakable gift of My love, to trust Me in lesser things? The greater gift may surely well be a pledge for the bestowment of all needed subordinate good!”

He promised to give “all things”; these “all things” are in His hand. They will be selected and allotted by His loving wisdom; crosses as well as comforts; sorrows and tears, as well as smiles and joys. Mourning one, this very trial which now dims your eye, is one of these “all things.” Trust His faithfulness. He would as soon wound the Son of His love as wound you!

“Won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us all things?” There is a “blessed impossibility,” after the bestowment of the Gift of Gifts, that He will inflict one unnecessary trial, or withhold one needed benefit. Think of His love when He offered His Isaac on the altar. It is the same at this hour infinite and immutable. Yes! We may well be reconciled, even to the denial of earthly blessedness, because ordered by Him who gave Jesus! Lying meekly in the arms of His mercy, be it ours to say in filial confidence, “Lord, anything with Your love; anything but Your frown!”

“All things.” The whole range of human needs and necessities is known to Him. The care He invites me to cast upon Him is “all my care”; the need “all my need!” This is His own special promise. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8) He will give me nothing and deny me nothing, but what is for my good. Let me not question the appointments of infinite wisdom. Let me not wound Him by one dishonoring doubt. Let me lean upon Him in little things as well as in great things. After the pledge of His love in Jesus, nothing can come wrong that comes from His hands! If tempted at times to harbor some unkind misgivings, let the sight of the cross dispel it. Looking to the Rainbow in the cloud gleaming with the words, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me!” be it mine to say:

Lord, though You bend my spirit low,
Love only will I see;
The very hand that strikes the blow,
Was wounded once for me.

21. SLEEPING AND WAKING

“Those also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Or, as these words have been rendered: "Those who are laid asleep in Jesus." We bid an earthly friend "Good night" in the pleasing expectation of meeting next morning. The saints are "laid asleep" in the grave of Jesus, in the sure and certain hope of meeting Him in the morning of immortality!

Child of God! weep not for those who have "departed to be with Christ." It is with them "far better." Do not think of them "gone." That is a word taken from the vocabulary of death, and which, it is to be feared, is often employed with many in the heathen sense of annihilation. Seek not "the living among the dead." Think rather that the last sigh was scarce over on earth, when the song was begun in Heaven! The Spirit winged its arrow-like flight among ministering seraphim. Hear that voice stealing down in the soft whisper of Heaven's music, and saying, "if you loved me you would rejoice, because I said, I go unto my Father!"

The body, the casket of this immortal jewel—the soul, is left for a season to the dishonors of the tomb. But it is only for a brief "night-watch." That dust is precious, because redeemed. Body as well as soul was purchased by the life-blood of Emmanuel. Angels guard these slumbering ashes; and the day is coming when God shall "send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other." Oh, if there be "joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents," what shall be the joy of those blessed beings over the myriads of rising dead, hastening at their summons to their crowns and thrones!

Christian mourner! "Your brother shall rise again." Wish him not back amid the storms of the wilderness. Be thankful rather that the wheat is no longer out in the tempest and rain; but safely garnered, eternally housed. Would you, if you could, weep that blessed one back from glory? Would you ask him to unlearn Heaven's language and be once more involved in the dust of battle? No, rather "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Death is not an eternal sleep. "Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Jesus is now whispering in your ear the glorious secret hidden from ages and generations, and which was left to Him, as "the Abolisher of Death," to disclose: "Your dead shall live; together with My dead body shall they arise." He is pointing you onward to that hour of jubilee, when the summons shall be addressed to all His sleeping saints: "Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust!"

Oh happy day! when I shall see my Savior God in all the glories of His exalted Humanity; and with Him, the once "loved and lost," now the loved and glorified, never to be lost again! "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you." Not one shall be wanting. In concert with those whose tongues are now silent on earth, we shall then unite in the lofty anthem, sung by the ingathered Church triumphant, "O death, where is your sting! O grave, where is your victory! Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ."

22. INVISIBLE HARMONIES

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

We are apt to, "limit the Holy One of Israel", and to say, "Some things have worked together for our good." God says, "All things!" Joys, sorrows, crosses, prosperity, health, sickness; the gourd bestowed, and the gourd withered; the cup full, and the cup emptied; the lingering sick-bed, the early grave! Often, indeed, would sight and sense lead us to doubt the reality of the promise. We can see, in many things, scarce a dim reflection of His love. Useful lives taken; blossoms permanently plucked; spiritual props removed; benevolent schemes blown up. But the apostle does not say, "We see," but "We know." It is the province of faith to trust God in the dark. The uninitiated and undiscerning can not understand or explain the revolutions and dependencies of the varied wheels in a complicated machine; but they have confidence in the wisdom of the Engineer, that all is designed to "work out" some great useful end. Be it ours to write over the mysterious dealing, "This also comes from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Let us "be still and know that He is God." "We have a wonderful advertisement of a Physician from the Spirit of Truth," says one, "who heals all your diseases. He requires but one thing, to take all He has prescribed, bitter as well as sweet!" He will yet vindicate His own rectitude and faithfulness in our trials; our own souls will be made better for them; He himself will be glorified in them. "Doubt not my love," He seems to say, "the day is coming when you shall have all mysteries explained, all secrets unraveled, and this very trial demonstrated to be one of the 'all things' working together for your good. Men see not the bright light in the clouds, "but it shall come to pass that at EVENING TIME it shall be light!"

23. THE UNCHANGING NAME

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Hebrews 13:8

All is changing here. Life is a kaleidoscope, made of shifting forms; new scenes, new tastes, new feelings, new associations; and alternation of cloud and sunshine, tempest and calm. Its joys are like the airy bubbles on the stream, tinted with sunlight; we touch them; they are gone! We have to tell of vacant seats in our sanctuaries; vacant seats at our home-hearths; the music of well known voices hushed. Often just when we imagine we have at last obtained a stable footing, the scaffolding gives way, the props on which for a life time we had been leaning fails, and we feel ourselves out amid the pitiless storm.

But is there nothing stable amid all this mutability? Nothing secure and abiding amid these fleeting shadows? Yes! Jesus is without any variableness. Nineteen hundred years have rolled by since He left our world. The world has changed, but He is to this hour the same. We can follow Him through all His wondrous pilgrimage of love on earth. We can behold Penitence crouching at His feet, and sent away forgiven. Sorrow tracking His footsteps with tears, and sent away with her tears dried and her wounded spirit healed. Pain and sickness pleading with pallid lip and wasted feature; and Disease, at His omnipotent mandate, taking wings to itself and fleeing away! And He who is now on the heavenly throne is “that same Jesus.” His ascension glories have not altered His changeless heart, or alienated His affections. In Him we have a Rock which the billows of adversity cannot shake. The spent fury of the chafing waves may reach us; no more; and this only endearing the security and value of the abiding Refuge!

How often does God rouse the storm to drive us from all creature confidences, to the stable One! How often does He poison and pollute the stream to lead us to seek the everlasting Fountainhead! “We may have lost much; but if we have found You, O blessed Jesus, we possess infinitely more than we have forfeited. We can glory in the persuasion that nothing can ever separate us from Your love.”

A look may alienate us from our best earthly friends; an unintentional word may estrange, the grave must sunder. But “the Lord lives, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” What You have been “yesterday”; yes, from everlasting ages; You are to this day, and You shall be forever and ever! We can look to the rainbow of your promises and behold all of them in You “yes and amen!” You are addressing us from your throne in glory; that throne spoken of in Revelation as encircled with “the rainbow of emerald” (the emblem of perpetuity), and saying, “Fear not, I am He that lives and was dead, and behold I am alive forever more!” “Because I live, you shall live also!”

24. STRENGTH FOR THE DAY

“As your days so shall your strength be.” Deuteronomy 23:25

Believer! have you not felt it so? Have you not found plants distilling balm, growing beside sorrow’s path? supports vouchsafed, which were undreamed of until the dreaded cloud had burst, and the day of trial had come? Trouble not yourself regarding an unknown and veiled future; but cast all your cares on God. “Our sandals,” says a saint now in glory, “are a proof against the roughest path.” He whose name is “the God of all grace” is better than His word. He will be found equal to all the emergencies of His people; enough for each moment and each hour as they come. He never takes us to the bitter Marah streams, but He reveals also the hidden branch. Paul was hurled down from the third heavens to endure the smarting of the “thorn”, but he rises like a giant from his fall, exulting in the sustaining grace of an “all-sufficient God.”

The beautiful peculiarity in this promise is, that God proportions His grace to the nature and season of the trial. He does not give an ‘advance supply of grace’, but when the needed season and exigency comes, then the appropriate strength and support are imparted. He does not send the rainbow before the cloud, but when the cloud appears, the rainbow is seen in it! He gives sustaining grace for a trying day, and dying grace for a dying day.

Reader! do not morbidly brood on the future. Live on the promise! When tomorrow comes with its trials, Jesus will come with tomorrow and with its trials too. Present grace is enough for present necessity. Trust God for the future. We honor Him, not by anticipating trial, but by confiding in His faithfulness, and crediting His assurances, that no temptation will He send greater than we are able to bear. Even if you should see fresh storm-

clouds returning after the rain, be ready to say, "I will fear no evil, for You are with me!" Insufficient you are of yourself for any trial, but "your sufficiency is of God." The promise is not "Your grace," but "My grace is sufficient." Oh, trust His all-sufficiency in all things. Jehovah Jireh, "the Lord will provide." See written over every trying hour of the future, "So shall your strength be!"

25. THE GRAVE SPOILED

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plagues. O grave, I will be your destruction." Hosea 13:14

Christian! the grave is lit with Emmanuel's love. The darkest of all clouds, that which rests over the land of Hades, has the brightest rainbow in it. These gloomy portals are not to hold your loved and lost ones forever. The land of forgetfulness, where your buried treasures lie, is not a winter of unbroken darkness and desolation. A glorious spring time of revival is promised, when the mortal shall put on immortality, and the corruptible shall be clothed with incorruption.

The resurrection of the body! It is the climax of the work of Jesus; its culminating glory. Paul represents a longing Church as "waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body." It was the pre-eminent theme of his preaching; "He preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection." It was the loved article in his creed, which engrossed his holiest aspirations, "If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead." It was the grand solace he addressed to other mourners. It is not when speaking of the immediate bliss of the departed spirit at the hour of death, but it is when dwelling on the "last trump"; the dead "rising incorruptible," and "caught up," in their resurrection bodies, "to meet the Lord," that he says, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." Blessed day; the Easter of creation! the dawn of the Sabbath morn! the Jubilee of a triumphant Church! Christian mourner! go not to the grave to weep there. Every particle of that moldering dust is redeemed by the oblation of Calvary; and the great Abolisher of death is only awaiting the ingathering of the elect to give the commission to His archangels regarding all His saints, which He gave of old regarding one, "Loose him and let him go!" And who can paint the glory of these resurrection bodies, reunited to their companion spirits, fashioned like their Lord's? Every sense, every faculty, purified, sublimated, overflowing with holiness; emulous with ardor in His service; eager to execute His will; retaining it may be, the personal identities of earth, the old features worn in the "nether valley." The Lamb, in the midst of the throne, "leading" them and "feeding" them; climbing along with them, steep by steep, in the path of life, and saying at each ascending step in the endless progression, "I will show you greater things than these!" Meanwhile He has Himself risen as the pledge of this resurrection of all His people. The Great Sheaf has been waved before the throne as the Pledge of the mighty harvest. "Christ the First Fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming." "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection!"

26. EVERLASTING LOVE

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you!" Jeremiah 31:3

Believer! are you tempted now to doubt His love? Are His footsteps lost amid the night shadows through which He is now conducting you? Remember He had His eye upon you before the birth of time; yes, from all eternity! What appears to you now some sudden capricious exercise of His power or sovereignty, is determination and decree of "everlasting love." "I have loved you," He seems to say, "suffering one, into this affliction; I will love you through it; and when My designs regarding you are complete, I will show you that the love which is 'from everlasting is, to everlasting!'"

Child of God if there is a ripple now agitating the surface of the stream, trace it up to this fountain-head of love. God is faithful. He cannot deny Himself. If some dark clouds are now intercepting those gracious beams, He must have some wise end to subserve.

"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will bring you back. In a moment of anger I turned my face away for a little while. But with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer. "Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again let a flood cover the earth and destroy its life, so now I swear that I will never again pour out my anger on you. For the mountains may depart

and the hills disappear, but even then I will remain loyal to you. My covenant of blessing will never be broken,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you. Isaiah 54:7-10

God sets His rainbow in the dark sky; and as if it were not enough that His people should look upon it and take comfort in its many and varied promises; He himself graciously becomes a party in gazing on the covenant pledge, “And the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I shall look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant!” (Genesis 9:16) He puts himself (so to speak) in mind of His own everlasting love! In His saint’s dark and cloudy day, when they imagine that their eyes are alone resting on the tokens of covenant faithfulness, the eye of a covenant keeping God is resting upon them too. “I will look upon my own promises,” He seems to say. “They shall be memorials to Myself of my purposes of unchanging mercy.” Nor is this love merely a general indiscriminate affection. The verse speaks of each individual member of the Covenant family, “I have loved you!” “O my Father”, says Madam Guyon, “it seems to me sometimes as if You did forget every other being in order to think only of my faithless and ungrateful heart.”

Let us seek to view our trials as so many cords of loving-kindness, by which our God is seeking to draw us, yes, and will draw us nearer Himself. Who knows what mercy may be bound up in what may seem to us dark and mysterious dispensations? We are apt to misname and misinterpret His ways. We call His dealings severe trials. He calls them “loving-kindness.” Drooping saint! let your eyes rest on the rainbow over-arching the throne of God, spanning from eternity to eternity; and read for your comfort the gracious declaration, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him.”

27. INVIOLENT ATTACHMENT

“There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24

Close is the tie which binds brother to brother; the companions of infancy, sharers of one another’s joys and sorrows; cast in the same human mold; having engraved on their heart of hearts, the same hallowed associations of life’s early morning.

But the time for separation at last comes. The birds must leave the parent’s nest, and try their pinions beyond their native valley. The world’s call to work and warfare is imperious. The old homestead, like a dismembered vessel, is broken to pieces; and the inmates, like the vessel’s planks, are strewn far apart on life’s ocean. The world’s duties sever some; unhappy estrangements at times, may sever others; death, at some time, must sever all.

But there is One whose friendship and love, circumstances cannot estrange, distance cannot affect, and death cannot destroy. The kindest of earth’s relatives may say to us regarding this true Elder Brother, as Boaz said to Ruth, “It is true that I am your near kinsman, however there is a kinsman nearer than I.” He is brother, yes more than a brother; Friend, Counselor, Portion Physician, Shepherd, all combined! Happy for us, when the old avenues of comfort are closed up, to hear Him, whose faithfulness is unimpeachable, saying, “I will not fail you or forsake you!” Happy for us when the old moorings give way, to have one safe Anchorage, that cannot be removed or shaken. “I shall now go to sleep,” said a remarkable saint, who, driven about with storm and tempest, at last found the safe Shelter, “I shall now go to sleep on the Rock of Ages!”

Tried believer! He has never failed you and never will. With Him are no altered tones, no fitful affections. The reed may be shaken, but the Rock remains immutable. He is Himself the true “rainbow in the cloud.” The promises of scripture, like the varied hues in the natural rainbow, are manifold. But all these promises are “In Him” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Yes, and it is in the “cloudy day” that this Divine encircling rainbow most gloriously appears. Never would we have known Christ as the “Brother, born for adversity,” unless by adversity. It is trial that unfolds and develops His infinite worth and preciousness. When the love of earthly friends is buried in the grave, the love of the Heavenly Friend shines forth more tenderly than ever. As Jonathan of old, wandering faint and weary in the woods, found honey distilling from a tree and was revived by eating it; so, faint and weary one; wandering among the tangled thickets, the deep glades of affliction, seat yourself under your “Beloved’s Shadow with great delight,” and let His “fruit be pleasant to your taste!” This “Tree of Life” distills a balm for every broken, wounded, bleeding heart; every faint and downcast spirit. Yes, Jesus will make, in this the hour of your loneliness and sorrow, His own life giving, life sustaining words and promises, “sweeter also than honey and the

honeycomb.” Though now exalted on the throne, “inhabiting the praises of eternity,” He still manifests the Brother’s heart and the Brother’s tenderness. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

28. THE SUPPORTING PRESENCE

“When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” Isaiah 43:2

What a diversity of afflictions in this trial world! “Waters,” “rivers,” “floods,” “flames,” “fires!” The Christian is here forewarned that he will encounter these in some one of their innumerable phases; whether it be loss of health, loss of wealth, loss of friends, baffled schemes, or blighted hopes.

But, blessed thought; these trials have their limits. The floods will not “overflow,” the fires will not “burn,” the flames will not “consume.” God will “stay His rough wind in the day of His East wind.” He will say, “Thus far shall you go, and no farther.”

And, better still, Jesus will be in all these trials, and prove sufficient for them all. We shall hear in the midst “of the great fight of afflictions” the sound of our Master’s footsteps. He Himself has passed through these flames, braved these floods, and bowed His guiltless head to these storms. He comes to us as He did to His disciples in the very midst of the tempest, and says, “Fear not, it is I, do not be afraid.”

Believer! what is your experience? Is it not that of the triumphant Israelites? “They went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in Him” (Ps 66:6) “The Flood!” the very scene of your trial, you were able to march boldly through it, unappalled by the threatening waves; yes, with your lips vocal with praise! How this moral heroism, this strange “rejoicing?” It was because the God of the Pillar-cloud was at your side. Your rejoicing was “in Him.” He made you “more than conqueror.” You may have many adversaries ranged against you: “Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword.” But there is ONE in the midst of fires and flames and floods mightier than all; and with Him at your side, you can boldly utter the challenge to the heights above and the depths beneath, “Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?” “Oh, Sirs!” says Thomas Brooks, “there is in a crucified Jesus something proportionable to all the difficulties, needs, necessities, and trials of His poor people.”

29. FELLOW-FEELING

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” Hebrews 4:15

“Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Ezekiel 1:28

What an elevating truth. The Sympathy of the God-man-Mediator (the true Rainbow in the cloud), JESUS in our sorrows! What a source of exalted joy to the stripped and desolate heart! What a green pasture to lie down upon, amid the windy storm and tempest, or in the dark and cloudy day!

The sympathy of man is cheering and comforting; but “thus far shall you go, and no farther.” It is finite, limited, often selfish. There are nameless and numberless sorrows on earth, beyond the reach of all human alleviation.

The sympathy of Jesus is alone exalted, pure, infinite, removed from all taint of selfishness. He has Himself passed through every experience of woe. There are no depths of sorrow or anguish into which I can be plunged, but His everlasting arms are lower still. He has been called, “The great sympathetic nerve of His Church, over which the afflictions, and oppressions, and sufferings of His people continually pass.” Child of Sorrow! a human heart beats on the Throne! and He has your name written on that heart. He cares for you as if none other claimed His regard. As the Great High Priest, He walks in the midst of his Temple lamps (His golden candlesticks,) replenishing them, at times, with oil; trimming them, if need be; but all in order that they may burn with a steadier and purer luster.

He was “tempted in every way.” Blessed assurance! I never can know the Sorrow into which the “Man of Sorrow” can not enter. Ah rather, in the midst of earth’s most lacerating trials, let me listen to the unanswerable

challenge from the lips of a suffering Savior, "Was there ever any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Yet He refused not to drink the cup of wrath! He shrunk not back from the appointed cross! "He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem;" and even when He hung upon the bitter tree, He refused the vinegar that would have assuaged the rage of thirst and mitigated physical suffering. Are we tempted at times to murmur under God's afflicting hand? "Think about all He endured when sinful people did such terrible things to Him, so that you don't become weary and give up." Hebrews 12:3. Shall we hesitate to bear any trial our Lord and Master sees meet to lay upon us, when we think of the infinitely weightier Cross He so meekly and uncomplainingly carried for us?

Afflicted one! Have your eye on this radiant Rainbow in your cloud of Sorrow! You may, like the disciples on the Transfiguration mount, "fear to enter the cloud," but hear the voice issuing from it, "This is my Beloved Son, hear Him."

Jesus speaks through these clouds! He tells us our cares are His cares; our sorrows His sorrows. He has some wise and gracious end in every mysterious chastisement. His language is, "Hear the rod and He who has appointed it" (Micah 6:9). He has too kind and loving a heart to cause us one needless or superfluous pang.

Oh that we may indeed hear the voice out of the cloud, and seek that the trials He sends in love may be greatly sanctified. Let us not dream that affliction of itself is a pathway to Heaven. Clouds do not form the material rainbow. These glorious hues come from the sunbeams alone. Without the latter, we could discern nothing but blackened heavens and dismal rain torrents.

It is not because those clad in "white robes" had "come out of great tribulation" that they were enjoying the beatific Presence; but because they had "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation. 7:14). We have only reason to glory in affliction when it has been the means of bringing us nearer the Savior, and leading us to the opened Fountain.

Jesus! my only hope you art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart;
Oh! could I catch a smile from Thee,
And drop into Eternity!

30. A SPEEDY COMING

"Yet a little while, and He shall come and will not tarry." Hebrews 10:37

"A little while," and the unquiet dream of life will be over, and the "morning without clouds" shall dawn. A few more tossings on life's tempestuous sea, and the peaceful haven shall be entered. A few more night-watches, and the Lord of love will be seen standing on the heavenly shore, as once He did on the shores of an earthly lake, with an eternal banquet of love prepared for His "children." Yes! "He comes!" that is the Church's "blessed hope." It is the voice and presence of her "Beloved" which will turn "the shadow of death into morning." The dead; the ransomed dead; shall "hear His voice and come forth;" those "asleep in Jesus" God is to "bring with Him." His final invitation is not, "Go, you blessed, to some bright paradise of angels prepared elsewhere for you;" but "Come share my bliss; be partakers in My crown," "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" Paul's heaven was described in two words: "With Christ." John's heaven was made up of two elements: of likeness to Jesus, and fellowship with Jesus. "We shall be like Him," "we shall see Him as He is." In his sublime apocalyptic visions, when "the door was opened in heaven," the first object which attracts his arrested gaze is, "One who sat upon the throne" around whom was "a rainbow like unto an emerald." (Revelation 4:2,3)

Our happiness will not be complete until we are ushered into the full vision and fruition of Jesus. We are nourished in this far off land from "the King's country," but we shall not be satisfied until we see the King Himself. Jacob received full wagon loads from Joseph, but he could not rest until he had seen Joseph with his own eyes; when he did so, the aged man's spirit "revived." We receive manifold pledges of covenant mercy from the true Joseph, in this "house of our pilgrimage" but we long to "behold His face in righteousness." We shall only be "satisfied" when we "awake in His likeness!"

"Come! Lord Jesus, come quickly!" "He will not tarry!" Each sun, as it sets, is bringing us nearer the joyful consummation. Time is hastening with gigantic footstep, to the advent throne. The sackcloth attire of a now burdened creation will soon be exchanged for the full robe of light and beauty which is to deck a "Sabbath world."

Happy day! when “the Rainbow,” in a nobler sense, “shall be seen in the cloud;” not the Rainbow of Promise, but He in whom all the promises blend and center; “Behold, He comes with clouds!” Seek ever to be in an attitude of watchfulness. Like the mother of Sisera, let faith be straining its ear for the whirl of the chariot wheels; that when the cry shall be heard; “Behold, it is He!” we may be able joyfully to respond, “Yes! this is our God, we have waited for Him!” “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, He will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.” Luke 12:37.

31. ETERNAL JOY

“Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return to Jerusalem, singing songs of everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be overcome with joy and gladness.” Isaiah 35:10

Believer! leave your “Rainbow in the cloud” behind you; and with your eye on the “Rainbow round about the throne” (Revelation 4:3), think of the glad return of God’s ransomed ones to Zion; every tear drop dried, every pang forgotten!

Once wanderers “in the wilderness, in a solitary way,” prisoners “bound with affliction and iron,” mariners struggling in a tempest (Psalms 112:4, 10, 23); mark the termination of their checkered history. God is not only represented as succoring their fainting souls, shivering in pieces their chains, and enabling them to buffet the angry surges; but He leads the pilgrims to “a city of habitation.” He rescues the captives from “darkness and shadow of death.” He brings the storm-tossed seamen to their “desired haven,” and puts the “everlasting song” into the lips of all, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalms 112:7, 14, 30)

Sorrowing one! tossed on life’s stormy sea, soon will that peaceful haven be yours. From the sunlit shores of glory, each and all of your trials will be seen to be special proofs of your Heavenly Father’s faithfulness, circled with a halo of love! You may now be going forth “weeping,” bearing your precious seed, but you shall “doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you.”

As some seeds require to be soaked in water before they germinate, so is immortal seed often here soaked in tears. But, “those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Though “weeping may endure for the night, joy comes in the morning!” “You are,” says Rutherford, “upon the entry of Heaven’s harvest; the losses that I write of are but summer showers, and The Sun of the new Jerusalem shall quickly dry them up.” The “song of the night” shall then blend with the song of the skies, and inner, glorious meanings will be disclosed to sight, which are now hidden from the eye of faith! “Sorrow and sighing shall forever flee away!” “No sickness, no sorrow, no pain,” said an aged saint now entered on these glorious realities; “but this is only your negative. What, O God! must be your positive?” “Songs,” “everlasting joy,” “joy and gladness.” It will be song upon song, joy upon joy, gladness upon gladness! These songs of Heaven will be “songs of degrees.” The ransomed will be ever graduating in bliss, mounting “from glory to glory,” each song suggesting the keynote of a louder and loftier one.

Reader! are you mourning the loss of those who “are not,” the music of whose voices is hushed for the forever of time, and who have left you to travel companionless and alone the wilderness journey? A few more fears, a few more tears, and you shall meet them in the day-break of glory! No, more; they have but anticipated you in an earlier crown. If they have left you behind for a little season to continue your night-song; think with bounding heart of that eternal day, when, looking back on the clouds floating in the far distance in the nether valley, you shall be able to join in the anthem said to be sung by the twenty-four elders as they gaze on the throne encircled by the “RAINBOW OF EMERALD,” for “they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!” (Revelation 4:3, 8)