

Piety for a personal conviction, he is plunged for the time into the greatest misery. It seems to him almost as if everything were giving way beneath him. One assails him on the supernatural character of CHRIST; another on the authority of the Scriptures; and others, bolder still, will question even the existence of God to him. And so he is launched on a black and stormy sea, over which he toils in rowing, and even when in the fourth watch the LORD appears to him marching over the waves, he is so broken down that he mistakes the Master for a ghost, and is terrified and affrighted. I tell you, friends, that when a soul is called to pass through such an ordeal it is no mere superficial anxiety that is felt. It is agony—deep, intense, enduring; and I charge you when your children are wrestling their way through it, that you do not upbraid them or blame them, but help them by entering into their difficulties, and removing if you can every stumbling-block from their path. And let those who are thus walking in darkness take to themselves the comfort of my text, and walk on in the full assurance that there is light beyond.

II. But now it is time to look at the COUNSELS TO THE DESPONDING which are given or suggested by this text. And here, very evidently, the first thing to be said is that *the oppressed spirit must keep on fearing the LORD and obeying the voice of His servant*. Whatever happens these must not be given up. Nothing whatever can furnish any proper reason for ceasing to practise them; while on the other hand the neglect of them will only deepen the darkness that is already over you. If, therefore, your depression comes from temperament, or disease, or trial, never think of giving up God and His service. The tunnel may be long, but it will come to an end at last, if only you will go through it. But if you stand still in it you will be always in its darkness. Walk on, therefore, and

whatever you feel let no evil be wrought by you, but keep steadily in the path of rectitude. And if you are involved in sceptical difficulties, let the same principle regulate you. Amid all your doubts you must accept some things as certain; hold by these, then, and act up to them, so will you prove that you are a docile learner and put yourself into a position where you will catch the first glimpses of returning light.

Very instructive in this regard is the experience recorded by Frederick W. Robertson, of his striving toward the light, in that terrible spiritual conflict which he fought out among the solitudes of the Tyrol. In one of his letters written there he says: "Some things I am certain of, and these are my *Ursachen*, which cannot be taken away from me. I have got so far as this: Moral goodness and moral beauty are realities, lying at the basis, and beneath all forms of the best religious expression." And, generalizing from his own case, he thus addressed the working-men of Brighton, in words which I delight to quote, because, though I did not meet with them until after I had written the former part of this discourse, they corroborate in the strongest manner what I have already said:

It is an awful hour—let them who has passed through it say how awful—when this life has lost its meaning and seems shrivelled into a span; when the grave appears to be the end of all, human goodness nothing but a name, and the sky above this universe a dead expanse, black with the void from which God himself has disappeared. In that fearful loneliness of spirit, when those who should have been his friends and counsellors only frown upon his misgivings and proudly bid him stifle his doubts. I know but one way in which a man may come forth from his agony scatheless: it is by holding fast to those things which are certain still—the grand, simple landmarks of morality. In the