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## The Solitary Places of Life.

By GERARD B. F. HALLOCK, D. D.

IT is said of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane that "He went a little further," to endure the agony he had to bear, apart from his disciples. They could not follow him in person or in spirit all the way. Their sympathy was sweet and helpful. In presence they could go with him a certain distance. But when it came to the supreme measure of the anguish of the hour no human heart could help. He must be alone with God.

Just so are there times in our lives when all human help fails to help. However loving and willing to render aid our friends may be, and however responsive to them and unwilling to separate ourselves from them we may be, yet there must come a place of division, a point from which, with all our thoughts and longings and heart-needs, we must "go a little further." Companionship must stop short of the depths of our Gethsemane. Christ "went a little further," and was alone with God. So must we go into some of the solitary places in life, the heart and the flesh crying out for the living God, and with no one but God able to meet us or understand us, commune with or comfort us as we tarry in the depths of the garden of grief or solitude into which we have entered.

What are some of these solitary places in life? One is the Gethsemane of bereavement by death. Friends may be ever so kind, may do ever so much, may send sweet messages, or say the most tender and sympathetic words, and yet we must "go a little further." All companionship is left behind and we suffer alone. No one can appreciate just how lonely we are without the loved one, just how much he or she was to us and how deep the grief we experience. Even a mother or loved wife or dearest sister or brother could not be made to understand fully our feelings. We have gone "a little further" than companionship can go, and we are alone in the garden of grief.

Another such solitary place is the Gethsemane of enforced decision of duty. This was one special feature of Christ's solitariness in the garden. Would he go on the cross or not? Was it his duty to go on? In this human nature, Christ shrank from death, as we all do, and he even prayed that the cup might pass from him. The struggle of duty was fought out to a decision there in Gethsemane. It was a struggle Christ had to make entirely alone. His disciples could not help him. No one could. Alone he fought; alone he won. It was a mighty spiritual victory, for when he retraced his steps from the garden's seclusion it was with his face steadfastly set toward Calvary.

Just so there are decisions of duty we must all make; and every place of such decision is a solitary place. Friends with their advice and sympathy and help may go part way, as Christ's disciples went with him into the garden; but there comes a place where they may stop, and we go "a little further" on; for in its final analysis every decision we make must be our own. Indeed, unless we make it, it is not our decision at all. If we make it, it is our own, and when made, it had to come from us in a solitary place, where no one else was by.

Another such solitary place is the Gethsemane of bodily pain. No one can feel your pain but yourself. No one else can endure your weariness. How powerless you were when your sick child lay moaning in feverish anguish, to enter into his soul, and diminish his suffering by sharing it. He was your own dear child, but were you not shut out as by a wall of adamant? Just so also are your friends shut out from you when you are in pain, for you are in another of those solitary places in life when you went "a little further" on.

Another such solitary place in life is in the Gethsemane of disappointed hopes and aspirations. People have disappointments of which they can never tell. Some, of our fondest hopes have been foiled, and yet we could not utter even a

whisper about them in any ear. Some of our highest aspirations, unrealized, have put us into a region where we dare not unburden our souls to any one, no matter how near and dear.

There are many such solitary places in life, but we mention only one other, the valley of death. We die alone. If you have ever stood at the death-bed, then you know what we mean. Have you ever seen a soul start off on the long journey? then you know how lonely a thing it is to die. Loving friends may be about the bed, and glad to go just as far along as ever they may, but there comes a point of separation. They must stop and the soul go on—alone out into the great unknown!

But we are not quite right in speaking of these solitary places in life as being necessarily absolutely without companionship. When Christ went "a little further" in the garden, God was with him. And, blessed be God, when we must go into our Gethsemane we may have Christ with us, a companion and friend who can understand us and help us. He can do for us what no other friend can do. When bereaved, or deciding duty, or in bodily pain, or when disappointed in our hopes and aspirations, he will be with us, if we have taken him for our friend, to guide and to cheer. And at last, when we come to die, he will be our faithful guide, and we shall be able to say with David, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The fact that there are solitary places in life only serves, then, to give emphasis to that other fact of our need of Christ for a friend. He will be your friend and mine if we let him. He stands at the door of your heart. Let him in.

## The Christian Life.

THE earthly parent trains his son, or his daughter, for earthly occupations. These last a little while. God trains us for an eternal end. Holiness, likeness to God, is the only end which is worthy of a man, being what he is, to propose to himself as the issue of his earthly experience. If I fail in that, whatever else I accomplish, I fail in everything. I may have made myself rich, cultured, learned, famous, refined, prosperous; but if I have not at least begun to be like God in purity, in will, in heart, then my whole career has missed the purpose for which I was made, and for which all the discipline of life has been lavished out upon me. Fail there, and wherever else you succeed you are a failure. Succeed there, and wherever else you fail you are a success.

That great and only worthy end may be reached by the ministration of circumstances and the discipline through which God passes us. These are not the only ways by which he makes us partakers of his holiness, as we well know. There is the work of that Divine Spirit who is granted to every believer, to breathe into him the holy breath of an immortal and incorruptible life. To work along with these there is the influence that is brought to bear upon us by the circumstances in which we are placed and the duties which we have to perform. These may all help us to be nearer and liker to God.

That is the intention of our sorrows. They will wean us; they will refine us; they will blow us to his breast, as a strong wind might sweep a man into some refuge from itself. I am sure there are some who can thankfully attest that they were brought nearer to God by some short, sharp sorrow than by many long days of prosperity.

But the sorrow that is meant to bring us nearer to him may be in vain. The same circumstances may produce opposite effects. I dare say there are people who will read these words who have been made hard and sullen and bitter and paralyzed for good work because they have some heavy burden to carry, or some wound or ache that life can never heal. Ah! brother, we are often like shipwrecked crews, of whom some are driven by the danger to their knees, and some

are driven to the spirit casks. Take care that you do not waste your sorrows; that you do not let the precious gifts of disappointment, pain, loss, loneliness, ill-health, or similar afflictions that come in your daily life mar you instead of mending you. See that they send you nearer to God, and not that they drive you further from him. See that they make you more anxious to have the durable riches and righteousness which no man can take from you, than to grasp at what may yet remain of fleeting earthly joys. So let us try to school ourselves into the habitual and operative conviction that life is a discipline. Let us beware of getting no good from what is charged to the brim with good. May it never have to be said of any of us that we wasted the mercies which were judgments, too, and found no good in the things that our tortured hearts felt to be also evils, lest God should have to wait over any of us, "In vain have I smitten your children; for they have received no correction."

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

## A Poor Dinner Made Rich.

By REV. J. E. SHEPARD, F. G. S.  
(Prov. xv. 17.)

POOR people do not often have rich fare. It is not often that poor children make a fuss over what they have to eat, for they are generally ready for their meals. It is possible to have rich fare, and yet not have a good dinner; to have plenty to eat, and yet not enjoy it. There is something needed to make the best spread enjoyable, and that will make the humblest fare a feast. That something is love.

What a wonderful thing love is! How strangely it enters the heart! How it sweetens and beautifies all it touches!

There is beauty all around  
Where there's love at home

When we have love in our heart we bring sunshine to the table, and so make it delightful to ourselves and all in the home. Once there was a dinner given, and it only consisted of barley bread and fish, and yet it was a grand time. Everybody was hungry, and so they were glad of it. Then Jesus blessed it, and gave it out; so His presence made it a feast to be remembered. They would not say the bread is coarse and the fish full of bones, but just eat with glad and grateful hearts; and when they went away they would talk about it for long enough. If we have Jesus in our hearts He will make the most common meal a very banquet. Have you ever thought how love comes into our hearts and what it does? I had a kind of dream the other day. I thought I saw a bright shining angel with wonderful powers leave heaven. I watched this angel come down the pathway of light; as it got near the earth it grew invisible and was lost to sight. I wondered where it went and what it had come for. Suddenly I saw a little girl; I looked into her face, it was so sweet and beautiful. She smiled upon me, and spoke so kindly. As I looked into her face I thought, How very like some face I have seen before hers is. Where can I have seen her, or who is she like? Then it dawned upon me, why her face is like the angel's I saw coming down from heaven. So I learnt that love imparts its likeness to all with whom it dwells. It comes gently into the heart, and climbs into the face, right up into the eyes, and seems to speak a language all its own. Love makes us more beautiful than anything else can do. Beautiful in countenance and in character; love gives us what riches cannot buy; it gives contentment. It says, "I've only got a poor dinner, but I might have had none, and so I'll make the best of it. It's only herbs, but how delicious they taste." Once John Wesley was out in the country travelling, and got very hungry. He had nothing to eat with him, and there was no house nigh. At length he saw some blackberry bushes, and, getting down from his horse, he plucked some and ate them, saying, "Thank God for the blackberries." That is the spirit in which