

THE QUIET HOUR

PROFIT GAINED FROM FAILURE.

If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities—2 Cor. xi.; 30.

"More than Victory advantage those who lose, than Victory advantage those who win."

Real Christianity is like a magic wand, transforming everything it touches and revealing beauty everywhere. Think of the way our Lord began his preaching. Why, His first recorded sermon seems to turn all one's natural conceptions of the value of things upside down. We naturally desire to be rich and prosperous, and to be liked and admired by our fellows. Yet the Greatest Teacher the world has ever known declares that the poor and hungry and suffering are really the blessed people; and He calls on those who are reviled and persecuted for His sake to "rejoice, and be exceedingly glad." If Christianity can fill a soul with joy under such circumstances then it is worth far more to us than any magic gift which the fancy of men can picture. St. Paul says that he finds it possible to "glory" in his infirmities, and to take "pleasure" in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. St. Paul is not a man to indulge in "cant" talk or high-flown religious sentiment. When he says a thing like that, it is not because he considers it the correct thing for a professing Christian to say, but because he has found it to be true in his own experience. He is an honest witness, no one who reads his letters and St. Luke's account of his missionary journeys can doubt that. If he could find pleasure in very unpleasant things, and could triumph in the midst of failure and defeat, why can't we do the same? His was no secret talisman, no mysterious alchemy. On the contrary, he was eager to show everyone this fresh spring of joy which could bring gladness into the most dreary life. His reason for glorying in his infirmities is that the power of Christ may rest upon him. Let us see whether such a position of security in trial and difficulty may be possible for us too. We all like to succeed, which is only another way of saying that failure in anything we are trying to accomplish is very painful and unpleasant. Of course, if our aims are low we may not have to face failure to any great extent, but one who aims high will find failure—or, at least, apparent failure—constantly dogging his steps. How can we rise above the depression which is the natural result of failing to gain what we are striving for? How can we, like St. Paul, wring victory from defeat and find it possible to rejoice in things which are naturally most distasteful? We may own, as a matter of theory, that the poet is right when he says that low aim, not failure, is criminal; but, as a matter of fact, most of us fear failure and find it almost impossible to extract joy from it. The failure may be only in such a small matter as the baking of a cake or the making of a shirt-waist. Or we may feel disappointed and discouraged if we fail (or think we fail) to make any real impression on the children we are trying to teach and help. Or it may be the failure to pass in an examination, or possibly the feeling that we are not making a success of our life-work that is troubling us. We feel not only discouraged, but also humiliated. Why? Can it be possible that even in teaching a Sunday-school class we have cared more to win the approval of our little world than to please God and help souls to grow nearer to him? If our motives have been stained and spoiled by the love of the world, then we may well thank God for the humiliating failure which—by its very pain—opens our eyes. If our object were purely to please God and to help our neighbor, then outward failure could never make us feel humiliated or discouraged. Our Master knows whether we have prayed and worked loyally and patiently,

and His "Well done!" is not in the least dependent on outward results. Our Lord presented a perfectly-finished life-work to His Father, quite apart from any outward result which might or might not appear on the surface. And we should look up, rather than around us to see whether our life is a failure or a success. To have one's work held up as a model for others to admire and copy is no proof of success. It is possible to win a great reputation for sanctity and good works, and to be well satisfied with that shallow success, really caring very little whether God is well pleased. And it is possible—perhaps more common than we think—for men and women to toil and struggle on patiently and quietly, winning little attention and admiration from the world, yet warmed and strengthened by the approving smile of their Master. They may fail again and again, but each failure brings only them to their knees, giving them a chance to win a real victory over pride and worldliness. They are ready to start out again on their Master's business, knowing that He is both able and willing to supply them with all the wisdom and strength they need. They never go to battle at their own charges, and they know that real failure is impossible if GOD is working through and with them. The pain of humiliation is hailed as a danger-signal, warning them that they have been seeking honor more from men than from God. So they grow stronger every time they are defeated in their plans, because failure in accomplishing what they desire makes them lean more on God. They cannot lose hope or grow discouraged if they never depend on their own power, but draw always fresh supplies of strength and wisdom from an Infinite Source. How can they own themselves beaten when they are fighting in the ranks of the KING OF KINGS, and leaning on His omnipotent arm! Why, in such a case, defeat is utterly impossible. God's side must be the winning side, and the true victor is one who conquers his own pride and self-will rather than he who can do everything well, and make an outward success of everything he undertakes.

"I know how far high failure overleaps the bounds of low successes." Some are so afraid of failing that they shrink from attempting great things for God. Like Moses and Jonah they think the probability that their message will be disregarded is a sufficient excuse for not trying to deliver it. How many people refuse to help in choir or Sunday-school, making the easy excuse that they have "no gift for that sort of thing." In making such an excuse, it is well to feel quite sure that God will accept it. He did not accept the excuses offered by Moses and Jonah. God sometimes chooses to use weak and inefficient instruments—as He conquered the host of Midian by Gideon's little army—so that no

one can fail to recognize His hand. Jonah at first turned his back on duty because he feared failure and possible danger for himself, but such a saving of one's life is really losing it.

"Tis man's perdition to be safe, When for the truth he ought to die."

If we seem to be succeeding easily in all we attempt, let us be very watchful, for such easy success is often the direst failure. Perhaps it may be the result of not aiming high enough. If a boy of twelve is satisfied to do the schoolwork which is hard enough for his little brother of nine, he may accomplish the work with easy pleasure and yet be really failing. To win success easily is very unsatisfactory, and, like failure, should bring us humbly to our knees. A life of easy luxury is not the most healthy for soul and body. Can we not be brave and wise enough to thank God for the difficulties and failures over which we must climb if we are to force our way upward? For by continual exercise our spiritual muscles grow strong, and we can rise from strength to greater strength, looking ever more and more eagerly for the approval of God, and only caring greatly for the approbation of men, when it is evidently a reflection of His. The approval of God's true servants is not a thing to be lightly regarded, for those who consecrate their lives in loving service may expect, like the Child Jesus, to increase in favor with God and man. But, though the approval of God's saints should be prized, it must not be allowed to become an absolute necessity. If God should see fit to withdraw even that stimulus for a

time, that trial is also a sign of His love. A soul that can dare to stand alone with God on the mountain, and can even look up and thank Him for that chance of gaining strength in the loneliness of battle, is a victorious soul indeed, and may well rejoice that the Captain has chosen him for a hard but glorious enterprise. It is worth while to be in the darkness for awhile, if Christ is there too. As Bishop Brooks says: "The ordinary depressions and discouragements of life are forever different from that darkness in whose center, at whose heart, hangs Christ on His cross. They are full of weakness. He throbs out strength—His own strength—through all the darkness which He pours around the soul."

Let us try to be brave enough to stretch out both hands for all God's gifts to us—pain and failure are His gifts as much as joy and success, even though they may be the result of our own fault.

"Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup unspilled. Brimming though it be with knowledge life's loss drop by drop distilled. I shall boast it mine—the balsam. Bless each kindly wretch that wrung From life's tree its inmost virtue. Tapped the root whence pleasures sprung, Barked the bole, and broke the berry. Left all grace Ashes in death's stern alembic loosed elixir in its place." HOPE.

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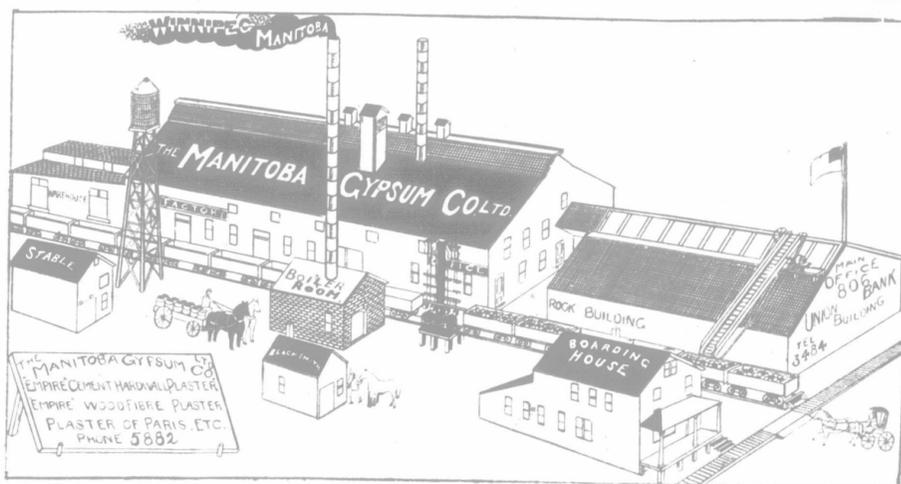
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