

THE QUIET HOUR

HE WHOM THOU LOVEST IS SICK

Round holy Rabia's suffering bed
The wise men gathered, gazing
gravely.
"Daughter of God!" the youngest said,
"Endure the Father's chastening
bravely:
They who have steeped their souls in
prayer,
Can every anguish calmly bear."

She answered not, and turned aside,
Though not reproachfully or sadly.
"Daughter of God!" the eldest cried,
"Sustain thy Father's chastening
gladly:
They who have learned to pray aright,
From Pain's dark well draw up delight."

Then spake she out, "Your words are
fair;
But oh! the truth lies deeper still:
I know not, when absorbed in prayer,
Pleasure or pain, or good or ill:
They who God's face can understand,
Feel not the workings of His hand."

—Oriental, from Hymns of the Ages.

What a world of agonized yet confident entreaty was compressed into that brief message, sent to the great Healer by two of His most intimate friends! The sisters of Lazarus think it quite unnecessary to tell their Friend they expect His help. He has the power to turn their sorrow into joy, and they are sure that He loves them. Nothing more is needed than the simple statement that Lazarus is sick. Of course, they think, He who has shown himself ready to heal any poor beggar by the roadside, He whose tender compassion and untiring service are poured out, like God's free sunshine, on the evil and on the good, will press eagerly to the assistance of those who have long proved themselves His tried and loyal friends.

But Christ's friendship is mysterious in its methods of working, going far beneath the surface. If these trustful suppliants had not been tried friends, possibly He might have instantly healed their brother, as was His usual custom. But they were special friends of the Good Physician, "Therefore

He abode two days still in the same place where He was," allowing Lazarus to die and be buried. How He must have trusted these loyal friends! How sure He must have been that they could stand a severe test, that they could trust Him through apparent unkindness! And they stood the test well. They could not understand His apparent coldness, but their love and trust were strong as ever. And, having strengthened their love and trust by exercise, enriched their own characters and learned the great truth that God can help to the uttermost after all apparent possibility of help has been swept away, then their wonderful Friend proved that His love was like the sunlight which shines always the same, though sometimes we fail to see it, because of black clouds—clouds which will surely pass away.

Are you quite sure that your friendship with Jesus is real and true? Then be sure of the fact that everything He allows to come into your life is a proof of His wise and tender love. You thank him for the sunshine of prosperity, don't forget to thank Him also for the bracing times of adversity. You thank Him for the sweetness of health, be sure to thank Him also for the bitter tonic of sickness. Do you never thank a doctor for bitter medicine which builds up your strength; or for his skilful use of a sharp knife, which may cause you agony, but seems a kind purpose in cutting off that which would poison every drop of your blood? You trust a surgeon's kindness, even when he deliberately cuts away a piece of your body, you know he is trying to help you, even when he hurts you most, or—what is often harder to bear—when he is hurting one you love. And the soul is far more precious than the body, so we ought to be willing to sacrifice some present ease, if only in that way can spiritual strength be won. The voice of history and of personal experience,

declares that richest spiritual gain is often the outcome of bodily weakness or pain, or of times of trouble.

One of Christ's beloved friends is sick. The Master apparently pays no attention to the earnest entreaties of His devoted disciples. He is trusting them to believe in His love, though they cannot see His face. He is treating them as fruitful branches of the True Vine, which must be "purged" that they "may bring fourth more fruit." He is refining away the dross, so that His own Beauty may be seen by a wondering world reflected in their shining, beautiful lives. If He strains their patience and loyal trust almost to the breaking point, it is not capriciously, but because that is the only way of making them strong. We can only learn how to do anything difficult by doing it again and again until "practice makes perfect," and we cannot possibly learn "patience" except by enduring patiently, nor "trust" except by trusting loyally, when we do not understand the reason for our pain of mind or body. These

through earthly mists to the Sun of Righteousness when the brain is clouded by sickness, or when bodily pain crowds out every other consideration. A friend of mine says she can never pray when she is ill, and she always knows she is getting better when the power to concentrate the thoughts in prayer returns to her. If the Great Friend expects His friends to trust Him when He does not give any outward expression of His ceaseless love, so also we may safely expect Him to trust us, and our love, when we find it almost impossible to pray in any connected fashion. We can lie back in weary trustfulness on the Great Heart of Love, knowing that He understands perfectly the desires of our hearts, and is pledged to fulfil them in the best possible way, if we leave the ordering of our lives to Him.

I think the Book of Psalms was intended by God as a special gift for His sick friends; it is so full of sweet and tender sayings, almost like the caressing touch of a dear hand which charms away the pain, or at least makes it bearable. Indeed, it is no fancy to say that God is not only the Physician, but also the watchful and considerate Friend, giving trained and tender nursing to His dear children, both by day and by night. In Psalm 42, we read that when a man has

shows Him to be near of kin to us, though so far above us in heroic self-forgetful endurance. His pain was intensified by taunts and unspeakable insults, instead of being soothed by the ministrations and sympathy of friends; and yet He reached out in watchful kindness to the disloyal disciple, to the weeping women, to ignorant soldiers, and repentant robber, to His loved disciple and holy mother, not forgetting to commend His departing Spirit at last into His Father's waiting Hands. Not one word of pain, after the victory in Gethsemane, except one appeal to man's sympathy, which showed that He was not stoically and coldly independent, and one cry to His Father, when a black cloud hid His Face for a moment.

How that wonderful unselfishness rebukes and inspires us! How ashamed we feel of our impatient groaning and grumbling, of our want of consideration for others, of our way of magnifying our own troubles and thinking of no one but ourselves! Those who claim to be friends of Christ must prove their claim by showing some likeness to Him.

HOPE

VILLAINY AND NERVES

Many overrought villains of the past, if they were alive now, would be subjected to a rest-cure, which, though it could not turn them into good men, might make their villainy less irrational and dangerous. The worst tyrants of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the worst Roman Emperors, seem to us incomprehensible monsters of iniquity, men who did evil for the love of it. We should understand them better if we considered how likely their way of living was to disorder their nerves. No doubt Nero, even if he had been brought up in the most modern way, taught from a child to take an interest in nature and to eat only the most wholesome things, would never have been a very useful or pleasant person. But he might have been a harmless faddist or an innocent if undistinguished minor poet.

As it was, he was the monster of the world, with no one to prevent him from eating and drinking what he chose or from taking whatever other unwholesome pleasures he was inclined to. No doubt he exceeded in everything, and suffered from extreme irritability in consequence. Unfortunately, he could indulge his irritability without restraint. If, when he felt cross of a morning, he ordered a Senator to die, the Senator did die, and he heard no more of it. Moreover, there was always fear to work upon a tyrant's nerves; and some emperors became tyrants because of that fear. Domitian was a martyr to it, though a good man of business. If he were a stock-broker of to-day no doubt he would worry himself incessantly about the state of the markets, and every one would pity him for his nervousness. As he was a Roman Emperor, we think of him as a sinister villain who killed men for the pleasure of it.

We often hear talk of that terrible tedium vitae from which Roman noble suffered. We should call it nerves now; and our doctors would prescribe a strict diet and a course of golf or gardening for it. But the Roman noble did not know how to treat it. He made a feast, and drank deep and fast, and crowned himself with flowers, and the next morning must have felt it worse than ever. But since he was a Roman noble he is a romantic figure to us and not a mere sufferer from our modern disease of overstrain.

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"I received this morning one of the funniest letters that ever appeared in my mail since I left the bench," said the Iowa Congressman.

"Tell me about it," said the man from the Bay State.

"Well," continued the other, "a constituent wrote me that he understood that the Department of Agriculture had developed a seedless tomato, which, to his mind, ought to be a mighty good thing. He wanted to raise some of them right away."

"Well?" rejoined the Iowan, "he said he wished I would send him some of the seeds by return mail."



THE BABBLING BROOK—

lessons are too priceless to be learned quickly or easily, but the Good Physician is too tender to hurt a soul more than is absolutely necessary for His perfecting in the beauty of holiness.

Pain is often terribly hard to endure, but it is a great help if we remember, as Bishop Ingram says, that "there is Someone who is tempering the flame, who is not letting one single throb of agony be too much or too great, that this is not a matter left to mad chance, or to the spirit of some devil—it is this which takes away the bitterness from pain. Lie still in the furnace, if the kind face of God is looking down on you; lie still in the furnace, because the moment the silver is so bright as to perfectly reflect the face bent over it, that moment it will be taken from the furnace."

If the friends of Christ find pain hard to bear, though his loving desire to make them beautiful, at all costs, meets with their full approval, how much harder it must be for those who have to suffer without knowing that their spiritual diseases are being skilfully treated by the Good Physician. Seek that greatest of all friendships while you are well, for it is far harder to see

been considerate and kind to the poor or sick (see margin), "the LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." In the margin it is given "turn" his bed, so even that homely duty of a nurse is undertaken by the King of Kings when one of His friends is sick. And one who feels that marvellous tendance may not be able to pray in words, and yet his heart may really be reaching out in sweet communion:

"The feeble hands and helpless, reaching
blindly
Through the darkness,
Touch God's Right Hand in that
darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened."

Just one thought more—for I must not take up more than my just allowance of space—the friends of Christ, in times of pain and sickness, must strive to reflect His beautiful considerateness. All through His last day of mental and bodily agony there was no trace of complaint, and only one request for a service in that cry, "I thirst," which