

Devotional Service.

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Again I am indebted to friends for expositions for these columns. I have no doubt, as in the September number, that the thoughts presented will be helpful and inspiring.

T. J. PARK.

OCT. 13.—"DARK DAYS AND THEIR LESSONS."

Psalm 107, 1-15.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., Oct. 7. Suffering with Christ.....1 Pet. 4, 12-19
Tues., Oct. 8. The silver lining.....Heb. 12, 5-11
Wed., Oct. 9. Working eternal glory.....2 Cor. 4, 15-18
Thurs., Oct. 10. Sorrow and helplessness.....5 Cor. 1, 1-7
Fri., Oct. 11. For the spirit of heaviness.....Is. 30, 13-32
Sat., Oct. 12. Joy beyond the cross.....Heb. 12, 1-3

Few psalms more beautiful than this one. Read it through. Note that the Lord is God's kindly providence over the weary and bewildered traveller, the miserable captive in the hideous prison, the sick and dying man, the seaman foundering in the storm. It is supposed this psalm was composed after the return from captivity, and was sung in the temple responsively, each choir concluding its part with a particular chorus of burden. Compare verses 8, 15, 21, and 31 with verses 6, 13, 19, and 28.

Our Lord prayed that his disciples should be kept from evil—not from sorrow. In this the servant was to be his Lord, and his Lord had been made perfect by suffering. Sorrow is the feature of this life which distinguishes it from the life beyond, and yet through the ministry of sorrow, this life is made more heavenly, and is more fit for heaven. It is not to be doubted that much we try continually to avoid becomes contributory to our welfare and happiness. And this at first sight seems strange.

Trouble is unavoidable. I do not say we should pray to be kept from trouble. For it does not so much matter what trouble meets us as the spirit in which we meet the trouble. Therein lies the weal or woe. The spiritual lies the pentagraph's stone, which can transmute the ills and prickings of daily experience into golden blessings, is a mystery possessed only by those who fully understand why the face of Stephen, broken with the brutal stone, shone as if it had been the face of an angel.

What are some of the ministries of sorrow?

1. We resort to the Word of God and to prayer. In the gala-day of pleasure, in the by-day of success, the plaudits of our fellows add to our joy. We may not feel need for further sympathy. But when pain, disaster, or disappointment attack and capture the citadel of our hope and gladness, when we suffer from the virus of a poison for which no human hand can furnish an antidote, are burdened with a sense of inability and insufficiency no friend can reinforce, sick with a loneliness friendships cannot dispel, we are driven to God. He knows what none other can understand. We can whisper in his ear the story of our suffering or our sin, our soul-secrets we could uncover only to our Father. So we creep close to the shelter of the Rock. We look up to Him who was in all points tempted as we are.

"There is never a cross so heavy
But the nail-carried hands are there,
Outstretched in tender compassion
The burden to help us bear.

There is never a heart so broken
But the loving Lord can heal.
For the heart that was pierced on Calvary
Doth still for His loved ones feel!"

Amid the uncertainties, the transitions of every-day life we cry out for something fixed, sure, reliable. We desire words of comfort. We seek the solutions of many enigmas. So we turn to the Book with its light on life's riddles, its promises of divine keeping and loving guidance.

5. In the dark hour we are taught to sing the song of trust. A writer tells of a little bird which would not learn to sing the song its master would have it sing while its cage was full of light. It listened and learned a snatch of this and a thrill of that, a polyglot of all the songs of the grove, but never a separate and entire melody of its own. Then the master covered the cage and made it dark, and then the bird listened and listened to the one song which it was to sing, and tried and tried again until at last its heart was full of it. Then, when they caught the melody, the cage was uncovered, and it sang the song sweetly ever after in the light.

Many of the sweetest of Christian heart-songs have been learned in the dark hour, and of these songs none more fully than the Song of Trust.

But Christians are not fatalists. But when they are in the place where duty calls them, they believe that God becomes responsible for them, that their "times are in his hands," that they can "cast all their care on him for he careth for them." They believe God has ways when they may not know, but whether by the Hill of Difficulty, or by the Valley of Humiliation, he shall lead them to the Beulah Land. "All things shall work together for good." What other insurance policy is like this? We may not see the "good" yet, but under God sorrow and suffering are the paths which frequently lead to it. We trust—we trust the hand that loves us, though it holds a scourge.

There is no comfort which so fills every chamber of the suffering soul like the knowledge of, and faith in, God's infinite, unchanging love for us. Possess this thought—rather, let it possess us, and it will sustain us in every trial.

All the universe is under his personal control; and he is not a man that he could forget any part or person in it. He is God—not a cold mechanism, not laws inflexible and unknowing, but the person who is all-wise, all-good, all-powerful, all-loving. He has revealed himself in his Son. We may not be able to trust ourselves, but we can trust Jesus. By faith we hear him say:

LEAN HARD.

Child of my love! I lean hard,
And let me feel the presence of thy care;
I know thy burden, for I fashioned it—
Poised it in my hand, and made its weight

Precisely that which I saw best for thee.

And when I placed it on thy shrinking form,

I said, "I shall be near, and while thou leanest

On me, this burden shall be mine, not thine."

So shall I keep within my circling arms
The child of my own love, here lay it down,

Nor fear to weary him who made, upholds,
And guides the universe.

Yet closer come;

Thou art not near enough—

Thy care, thyself,

Lay both on me, that I may feel my child
Reposing on my heart.

Thou lovest me?

I doubt it not; then, loving me, lean hard.

3. Sorrow aids in cutting the chains which bind us to the worldly life. Perhaps no worse than any other age, but certainly in this age, the struggle is against materialism, against the absolutism of the world and the flesh. It seems strange that what we often consider our greatest material good—health, fortune, success—do not always minister to our moral and spiritual good, do not always lead to a nobler character and divine aspiration. But they do not always so minister. Possessing these material goods we are inclined to live in them, and to so live in them that we degrade and coarsen our souls—forgetting God. The times when men grow to fill greater moulds of character, are fitted to wide fields of exertion, are rarely, if ever, the times of great health, ease, luxury, and of uninterrupted sunshine. The periods of growth are rather the times when the cloud of prosperity is obscured by the sun. Listen to aged persons tell the story of their lives and note the exceeding value they place upon their past dark days.

Our thoughts, our hopes, our love often become anchored to the worldly by fortune and success. God in love breaks up that anchorage. It is painful for us. The weaving process is always painful, but it is healthy.

So sickness brings the doctor to the door, and we discover what a frail and unstable thing is human existence, we have been fixing our gaze upon the earth, so death opens the windows of the sky, and in the light of the loved one we get a glimpse of immortality and glory; our hopes and entire efforts have been absorbed in money-making. Other claims have been ignored. So some morning finds our riches taking wings, and we are poor. In our pain the heart cries for something sure, eternal, that passeth away and we leave the life unsatisfied not in the abundance of things a man possesses.

Many an earthly idol must be broken before God has the opportunity of fixing up the throne room in our heart for himself.

4. Through suffering and trial we develop tenderness and strength. Softening agencies are requisite to keep the spirit from being annealed by the world. Mr. Barrie, in the "Window in Thrums," describes Jamie sending to Jess, his mother, his monthly savings; and visiting home from London, leaving in her lap a five-pound note (whistling while to hide his feeling); and he adds "I do not know the history of that five-pound note, but well aware am I that it grew slowly out of penes and sin, and that Jamie denied his passions many things for this great hour. His sacrifices watered his young heart and kept it fresh and tender. Let us not cheat our consciences by talking of filthy lucre. Money may be a beautiful thing. It is we who make it grimy."

The same author tells: "How my mother got her soft face, and who shall forget Margaret Howe in 'The Bonnie Briar Bush,' who, like 'Margaret Ogilvy,' had her nature softened by sorrow, and enriched by demands upon her self-denying soul."

Temptations resisted, trials endured are God's ordained methods for building strong and stately character. Moral muscle, like the physical, can be hardened only by the burden and the strain.

I have said "temptations resisted, and burdens endured." Suffering in itself is not a blessing. It is in itself an unmitigated evil. It is only when received in the right spirit that it reacts aright in the spirit, and sweetens and strengthens it. Otherwise, there will be discouragement, complaint, reckless indifference, and mental deterioration. Trials well received are the rough all