

## DIFFICULT TEXT SERIES.

## THE SLEEP OF GOD'S BELOVED.

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"For so he giveth his beloved sleep."—  
Psalm cxvii. 2.

This is one of the most beautiful texts in the Bible. It attracts the mind through the sentiment which it enshrines. It falls like sweet music on our ears and soothes us by the very rhythm of the words. It is a thought of comfort which might well be whispered in dying ears as the storm of life sinks into peaceful calm. "For so he giveth his beloved sleep."

The poets have often taken this subject as a theme and have wound around it some of the sweetest gems of poetry. So Elizabeth Barrett Browning sings:

"Of all the thoughts of God that are  
Borne inward unto souls afar,  
Along the psalmist's music deep,  
Now tell me if that any is,  
For gift or grace surpassing this—  
He giveth His beloved sleep."

But, familiar as the text is, its true meaning is often misunderstood. Few texts have been interpreted in so many different ways.

It has been taken to mean Natural Sleep.

And this, indeed, is one of God's best gifts. It is one of the strongest and most imperious of the appetites of our physical being. It is periodic and follows a term of waking activity, passing from agreeable repose into unconsciousness. Sleep is absolutely necessary to health and strength. Its demands may be resisted and fought against, but it will have its own revenge. The case is recorded of the captain of a warship engaged in the attack upon Rangoon who kept awake for hours by sheer force of will, but who in the height of the action fell asleep beside one of the largest guns of his ship although the gun was in constant use. So Napoleon slept during the fierce roar of cannon at the battle of Leipsig. But too often resistance leads to sleeplessness, and Nature's sweet restorer forsakes the tired eyelids.

Insomnia becomes one of the most distressing conditions of ill-health. It was with reason the

French financier cried, as he looked over the quotations of the market, "Alas! Why is there no sleep to be sold?" It is a frequent cause of physical wreck, and often leads to insanity. The fathers of the hideous Inquisition saw that to keep a man awake was the refinement of torture, and used it on their victims with awful effect.

But natural sleep is a gift of God to all alike. It comes to the just and to the unjust. It is not peculiar to God's beloved.

Some men can sleep at will, as did Napoleon in battle, as did Alexander the Great, who had to be awakened to begin the battle with Darius; as did Cato before his act of self-destruction. This is not the gift of which the psalmist sings.

The text is interpreted to mean the sleep of a quiet conscience, a possession which stands on high authority as being above all earthly dignities. It is that state of heart and mind which is voiced in the prayer:

"That with the world, myself and Thee  
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be."

The apostle Peter slept peacefully in prison between two soldiers bound with two chains.

But this is not the sleep of God's beloved, for the greatest criminals who had not God in all their thoughts have slept like innocent children on the very eve of execution.

The text is taken to mean a peaceful death, as when it is said of Duncan, "after life's fitful fever he sleeps well." This meaning seems natural enough, and, while not the teaching of the passage, is true. We all at some time look upon death as a sleep where "beyond these voices there is peace." So Jesus said to His disciples "our friend Lazarus sleepeth," and Christians have applied to the last resting place of their dead the expressive term "cemetery," or sleeping place. It gives death a new meaning when it is robbed of all its terrors, and made the natural rest after the duties of life. For sleep is necessary and natural and refreshing, a type of the calm repose of souls in Christ their Lord.

"Asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep,  
From which none ever wake to weep."

The true meaning of the text is brought out in Luther's German Bible and in the marginal reading of the Revised Version. "For so He giveth unto His beloved in sleep." This is clear from the context, which declares that it is vain to rise up early and late, take rest and eat the bread of toil, for the gifts of God are made while we are sleeping.

The lessons of the text are then easily read. We are taught the truth of God's providential care which finds its best illustration in the "manna" graciously provided in the wilderness journey. They found God's merciful provision of daily bread every morning around the whole camp. While they slept, God's loving care was seen in the gift of food in abundance and suited to their needs. And behind this lies another lesson, for the manna is a type of Christ's gospel which is free to all, the gift of grace, provided by God Himself in the wilderness of life and needed by all alike for the life of the soul.

The Christian who is "accepted in the Beloved" stands in a peculiar relation to God. He is "in Christ," and in Him partakes of the riches of a Father's love. In the gift of Christ all else is included, for "how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

The text also bears upon its face the lesson that there is One Who Exercises Divine Forethought. His care over us never ceases. His provision for our needs is constant and complete. There is One Who is our Divine Guardian "An eye that never sleeps beneath the wing of night," but watches above us, and in watching gives to His beloved in sleep.

When asked why he favored the spread of Christianity, a Japanese statesman replied: "The Christian subjects of Japan are conspicuous for orderly conduct and faithful discharge of obligation."

Sixty years ago the Government of India forbade its officials to employ native Christians in the public service. Brahmins and Moslems were preferred. This year a Bengal Christian, a pupil of Dr. Duff, was appointed chief justice at Raepore, in Central India.