

THE SILENCE OF SYMPATHY.

Great sorrow is silent. The soul is overwhelmed. It sinks under the hand of God into helplessness. In the presence of His power, and under the sense of His righteousness, there is a terrible dread of other and still greater sorrow. When His hand is upon us, we know that it is in justice; but conscious of sinfulness, we know not the limit of pain He may inflict, and we are afraid. "I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." At such a time the language of ordinary life is meaningless, and seems by its feebleness to mock the heart whose sorrow seeks to burst forth like a torrent. There are groanings that cannot be uttered, emotions which are wordless until the terrible pressure gives new meanings to familiar words, and forces a channel in language which can be understood in its great depth and overflowing fulness only by those of like experience. We sit alone. The presence even of friends is an intrusion; their words jar our hearts, and their well-meant sympathy is only an opening of the fresh wounds. After the first great tumult is over, after the shock of the blow has passed a little, after time has taught us the language of sorrow, or when we feel the touch of the hand of one whose sorrow has been greater, the lips speak; but until then the grief is too sacred to be shared with any one, and is hidden away in the secret chambers of the soul.

Therefore true sympathy is also silent. It respects this sacredness of sorrow and does not ask to share that which is not offered. With an instinctive knowledge of the unutterableness of too great emotion, it waits for the speaking of the crushed heart. As when one is found by the road side, wounded and bleeding and sinking, the hands are busy in needed service; every want is ministered unto; the flowing blood is stanching and the gaping wounds closed, but the story of the casualty is not asked for until the suffering one revives. So sympathy for the wounded, bleeding heart is silent. It serves, but waits until the fitting time for words. Job's friends were wise in their first overtures of comfort. They "sat down with him upon ^{around} seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word ^{to him}; for they saw that his grief was very great." See, also, how He rendered service such as was needed, but said little. When He came to the sisters, He went to the grave with them weeping. Their sorrow was His own, and His tears were a stronger expression of sympathy than any words could have been. "See how He loved him," they said who saw Him.

Not knowing the exact measure of the sorrow of others, our words even of kindness may grate upon their hearts by their inappropriateness. Our well-meant attempts to comfort may only irritate. The commonplace expressions of the mysteries of Providence, the greatness of the affliction, and the wise purpose of good to be wrought in us thereby, may at first fail to awaken any response and be useless, because the sufferer sees as yet only the sorrow and not the sovereign grace.

It is better, therefore, to be silent until we know what is fitting to be said. And when we do speak, let it be, not in explanation of the mysteries of God's ways, but in encouragement to simple faith in God and in Christ. "Believe, and thou shalt see the glory of God," was the message of Christ to the sisters. "Let not your heart be troubled," He said to the sorrowing disciples, "ye believe in God, believe also in Me." But until we know that the heart is ready to hear our words, let our tears and our tender and silent services express our sympathy with sorrow.

Blessed are they whom God so sustains in the very shock of sorrow, that their lips are at once opened to praise Him.

SHUN THE SCEPTIC.

First, I warn you to shun the sceptic—the young man who puts his fingers in his vest and laughs at your old-fashioned religion and turns over to some mystery in the Bible and says, "Explain that, my friend; explain that;" and who says, "Nobody shall scare me; I am not afraid of the future; I used to

believe in such things, and so did my father and mother; but I have got over it." Yes, he has got over it, and if you sit in his company a little longer, you will get over it too. Without presenting an argument against the Christian religion such men will by their jeers, and scoffs, and caricatures, destroy your respect for that religion which was the strength of your father in his declining years, and the pillow of your old mother when she lay dying.

Alas! a time will come when that blustering young infidel will have to die, and his diamond ring will flash no splendour in the eyes of Death as he stands over his couch waiting for his soul. Those beautiful locks will lie uncombed upon the pillow, and the dying man will say, "I cannot die—I cannot die." Death standing upon the couch says, "You must die; you have only half a minute to live; let me have it right away—your soul." "No," says the young infidel, "here are all my gold rings, and these pictures, take them all." "No," says Death, "what do I care for pictures?—your soul." "Stand back," says the dying infidel. "I will not stand back," says Death, "for you have only ten seconds now to live; I want your soul." The dying man says, "Don't breathe that cold air into my face. You crowd me too hard. It is getting dark in the room. O God!" "Hush," says Death, "you said there was no God." "Pray for me!" exclaims the dying infidel. "Too late to pray," says Death; "but three more seconds to live, and I will count them off—one, two, three." He has gone! Where? Where? Carry him out and bury him beside his father and mother, who died while holding fast the Christian religion. They died singing; but the young infidel only said, "Don't breathe that cold air into my face. You crowd me too hard. It is getting dark in the room."

THE TRANSFERRED BURDEN.

"If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?"—Ezek. xxxiii. 10.

If they are upon us, how can we live? For "mine iniquities are . . . as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." "The burden of them is intolerable." It is not the sense, but the burden itself which cannot be borne; no one ^{being sunk lower and lower, and at last to hell by it.} can bear his own iniquities. It is only not the very elasticity of sin within us keeps us from feeling the weight of the sin upon us; as the very air in our bodies prevents our feeling the otherwise crushing weight of the atmosphere with its tons upon every inch. Or (thank God for the alternative!) when the whole burden, our absolutely intolerable burden, is known to be laid upon another.

If this burden is upon us, we cannot walk in newness of life, we cannot run in the way of His commandments, we cannot arise and shine. The burden is "too heavy" for these manifestations of life; we do but "pine away" in our sins, whether consciously or unconsciously; and the sentence is upon us, They shall "consume away for their iniquity." For there is no curse so terrible and far-reaching as, "He shall bear his iniquity."

"If!" but is it? It is written, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." On Jesus it has been laid, on Him who alone could bear the intolerable burden; therefore it is *not* upon His justified ones who accept Him as their sinbearer.

This burden is never divided. He took it *all*, every item, every detail of it. The scapegoat bore "upon him *all* their iniquities." Think of every separate sin, each that has weighed down our conscience, every separate transgression of our most careless moments, added to the unknown weight of all the unknown or forgotten sins of our whole life, and all this laid upon Jesus instead of upon us! The sins of a *day* are often a burden indeed, but we are told in another type, "I have laid upon thee the *years* of their iniquity." Think of the *years* of our iniquity being upon Jesus! Multiply this by the unknown but equally intolerable sin burdens of all His people, and remember that "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us *all*," and then think what the strength of His enduring love must be which thus bare "the sins of *many*."

Think of His bearing them "in His own body on the tree" in that flesh and blood of which He took part, with all its sensitiveness and weakness, because He would be made like unto His brethren in all things; and that this bearing was entirely suffering (for He "suffered for sins"), and praise the love which has not left "our sins . . . upon us."

We cannot lay them upon Him; Jehovah has done that already, and "His work is perfect." "Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He hath done this." We have only to look up and see our Great High Priest bearing the iniquity of our holy things for us; to put it still more simply, we have only to believe that the Lord has really done what He says He has done: Can we doubt the Father's love to us, when we think what it must have cost Him to lay that crushing weight on His Dear Son sparing Him not, that He might spare us instead? The Son accepted the awful burden, but it was the Father's hand which "laid it upon" Him. It was death to Him, that there might be life to us. For "if our transgressions and our sins" were upon us, there could be no answer to the question. "How should we *then* live?" for we could only "pine away in them" and die. "Ye shall die in your sins." But being "laid on Him," how shall we *now* live? "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for Him and rose again." Unto Him, by Him, in Him, for Him, now; and with Him, where He is, for ever and ever!

On Thee, the Lord
My mighty sins hath laid;
And against Thee Jehovah's sword
Flashed forth its fiery blade.
The stroke of justice fell on Thee,
That it might never fall on me.

TWO SIDES TO EVERYTHING.

We are all familiar with the legend of the upreared shield by the roadway, one side of which flashed silver rays in the sunlight, while the other side was golden; and how two valiant knights journeying from opposite directions met under this shield and argued, first with hot and hasty words, and then with the sharp point of their lances, to convince the other that he was wrong; but when in the progress of their severe and bloody contest they changed places, they glanced upward and found to their shame and confusion that they were *both right*.

They had both fought conscientiously for what had appeared to them to be the truth, but they had each seen only one side.

We can only imagine them upbraiding themselves for their foolish obstinacy and self-conceit, as they lay wounded and exhausted after this needless conflict, yet it is quite likely that when sufficiently recovered, each rode off ready to enter again into mortal combat with any who might dare to differ in opinion with him.

The same intolerant spirit which animated these hot-headed knights still prevails. Intelligent, conscientious people of to-day, are constantly coming in contact with others equally educated and thoughtful, but they have been differently trained. Coming from opposite directions, they do not see things from the same standpoint. Then follow endless tilts and jousts; their lances which should be kept ready for the protection of the weak and the advance of the right are often dulled and dimmed in petty squabbles concerning some trivial, unimportant point. What matters it after all whether the shield be silver or gold? Why should not each enjoy his own opinion, so long as there is no principle at stake, if it makes him happy.

But as then, so now there are those who dogmatically insist that others *must* see through their eyes and act according to their standard, allowing no freedom of thought, nor liberty of speech, save in grooves, whose narrow confines bound their own line of duty.

Often, because of the determined endeavours on the part of one person to curb and conquer the natural instincts of another, and in the purpose and desire of that other to carry out that which he sees written on