

the Bible teachings, sometimes it is by means of the counsel of others, sometimes it is by means of His providences, that God points out the course to be pursued in an emergency. But it is for the individual himself to learn for himself the lesson which God teaches him. No one of us can tell another just how God will make His truth known to that soul. The soul must look to God for this knowledge, and must look in unwavering trust, assured that the needed guidance will be granted, and accepting it when it comes.—S.S. Times.

UNBELIEF.

LORD, help thou me ! Oh, haste to my relief !
Touch Thou mine eyes, sin-blind, that I may see
The beauty of Thy face ; Lord, show Thou me
The way of Truth. Against the storm-swept reef
My ship so frail must surely come to grief
Without Thy guiding hand, Star of the sea ;
With faith in Thee, my Pilot Thou shalt be.
Lord, I believe ; help Thou m'ine unbelief !
The road I tread is long—the path is steep—
I blindly grope, as one bereft of sight,
I stumble, crying, " Lord, is there no light—
No hope beyond ? " Out of the lowest deep
I call : " Lord, I believe : O help Thou me ! "
The clouds part, and the Cross of Christ I see.
—Henry Coyle.

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.

(DECEMBER 26TH.)

IN the collect before us we have the first martyr praying to the Lord Jesus for his murderers, teaching us by his example that we, too, should "love and bless our persecutors."

Let us practise the lesson we here learn. It is an unspeakable privilege that we are invited and encouraged to come straight to the Lord Jesus, especially in those times of trouble when His sympathy is so helpful to the soul. No doubt when we come to the Father, relying upon His name and mediation, our prayers are no less acceptable and sure of an answer of peace, and usually it is this form of prayer which is set before us in the Word ; but when the soul is sore tempted, when pain and suffering rack the body, when a heavy burden of grief weighs upon the spirit, we delight to hear the voice that calls us to the feet of the loving Saviour, who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and who mercifully invites us, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The prayer of the collect refers to *those who suffer here upon earth for the testimony of Christ's truth*. Stephen, as we know, suffered for this, even unto a cruel death. This "cross" has not ceased, and

never will. Those who, by a holy life and a bold witness for the truth as it is in Jesus, hold up the banner of the Gospel will find from time to time many opposers and many enemies.

"The whole counsel of God" is not palatable to the carnal mind. The exceeding sinfulness of sin and the certainty of the divine judgment upon it, the absolute necessity of a new birth unto righteousness, and of old habits and wrongdoing being utterly cast off, the call to men to become humble and contrite before God, the worthlessness of our works to obtain pardon, the command that men must live godly, righteous, and sober lives, and the doctrine of salvation through the cross—these things are not pleasant to those who are yet in the flesh, and to insist upon them often brings the world's hatred and disfavor.

But it is a blessed proof of the reality of our hope when, for Christ's sake, we are willing to bear scorn and ridicule. Such are bidden by Christ to rejoice and be exceeding glad, for "great is their reward in heaven."

We are told of Stephen that he was *full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost*.

Here was the secret of his boldness and courage, of his unflinching testimony against the obduracy and unbelief of those who disputed with him, and of the marvellous grace which enabled him to love and bless his persecutors. We must plead for the same power in the Holy Ghost. Bold and able witnesses for God's truth are always needed, and only by the Holy Spirit can they be raised up. Let our prayers be constantly offered up for this. "Come, blessed Spirit, fill all our hearts with Thy presence ! Make us strong and bold to speak Thy truth ! Raise up amongst us a goodly band of faithful men who shall everywhere witness for Thy name and Thy truth !"

Then we are told that Stephen *looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God*.

What a glorious encouragement in his hour of deepest need ! It soon he would have done with earth, a better world was open to his vision. If soon, wounded and bruised, his body would be carried to its resting-place, his spirit would be borne upward to the place whither Christ had gone before.

We, too, "by faith may look up steadfastly into heaven, and behold the glory that shall be revealed." Mark how St. Paul did this in a passage clearly referred

to in the collect : "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory that shall be revealed in us*" (Rom. viii. 18). Put together the whole sufferings and sorrows of a life such as that of Paul in the one scale and the future glory in the other, and what is the comparison ? Only as the dust in the balance beside the eternal weight of glory prepared for those who follow the Lord Jesus.

But Stephen saw more than this. He saw "Jesus : standing at the right hand of God." What a forcible explanation of this is given in our collect : "O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succor all those who suffer for thee" ! Yes, truly blessed is that glorious Helper and Advocate, who thus stands up ready to shield, to defend, to plead for each of His own ! Believe it, Christian, both in the lesser and greater trials that befall you in your service for Christ. It may be a heavy blow, it may be a sarcastic word, it may be a chilling look ; but look up and see Jesus ready to succor and aid you, never leaving nor forsaking you, but in marvellous tenderness caring for you and delivering you in due season. It was in the strength of this divine assistance that Stephen offered to the Lord Jesus this earnest prayer.

And here it is most interesting to trace the resemblance of his prayer to that of the Lord Jesus. We remember how Christ, when nailed to the cross, exclaimed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then, shortly before His death, He yielded up His spirit, saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

In Stephen's case we have the very same petitions. Only as Christ prayed to the Father, Stephen prays to Jesus. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

His work was done. Through his prayer another was to be raised up who should more than fill his place. And by his closing words he taught the whole church the mighty power of divine grace, and left such a commentary on the Saviour's words as should enforce them till the end of time : "I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."—Rev. G. Everard, M.A., in *Home Words*.

TRUE dignity is never gained by place, and never lost when honors are withdrawn. —Massinger.