

of thorns or figs of thistles"? This is never seen in nature; and unless God stretches out His hand, as by a miracle, the thing is impossible. But in grace it is a daily fact. Yes, since the thorns and thistles which the sin of Adam has germinated in our soil, crowned the blessed head of Jesus and pierced his virginal flesh, thorns have produced grapes, and thistles have brought forth figs; and just because they thus grew, have these fruits a taste more exquisite than if they had grown upon their own natural branches. If all the substance of our joy is in grace, does not all grace proceed from the passion of Jesus? Yes, henceforth and forever, to be afflicted with Jesus is the sweetest thing of the world; and those among our brethren, the most experienced, have assured us of this fact.

And to you, whom God Himself has, in his mysterious ways, deprived of all that made the joy of your life and the power of your hearts; to you, from whom he has taken brothers and sisters, wives and husbands and children, and whom he has called hereafter to journey alone, have I not the right, in conclusion, to apply these words to you, and in them to find consolation for you? Yes, I will venture to say it: if by love and submission you have accepted the divine will, if you have turned this forced and cruel sacrifice into a voluntary sacrifice, if you have said: "Father, not my will, but thine be done," to you also it will be given to find here below joys which you never thought yourself able to experience. I have seen the Christian woman whose life had been twice devastated, widowed and deprived of her children, at first withstanding desperately, then bending under the hand of God, and then, in her profound grief dreaming of those who bewailed a similar grief; and I have seen her heart open to the innumerable miseries of the world, welcoming the orphans, thinking of those who forgot the world, creating for herself by charity a new family, and enlarging her life by the measure of suffering which it encountered. And can I forget that this same word *widow*,

which, for the heathen and under the Old Testament, was a mark of sorrow without possible relief, became in the primitive Church the collective name of the Christian women who were called to the magnificent ministry of consolation? Admirable transformation! Those who console are the most afflicted! The lives that are the most despoiled are the ones that enrich the world. It is in the darkest night that the radiant brightness of immortal hope arises. "The desert has flourished like the rose," and under the blow of the divine rod the rock has opened for the flow of the gushing waters.

Yes, the earth itself has its compensations for those who are employed in divine work; but you know well enough that it does not satisfy. Too much of suffering, too many shadows, too many imperfections, too much of sin, too much of bitterness, yet mingles with our lives. These joys, by which God so largely recompenses our sacrifices on this earth, are an admirable proof of His fidelity. We should taste of them with a profound acknowledgment. We should seek in them all the power they contain. But we should remember that, after all, they are naught but the premises of that happy reality by which Jesus Christ crowns all His promises and which He calls eternal life. There only will there be perfect repose and joy, without alloy, because there only we shall see God as He is. Amen!

ABIDING STRENGTH AND GLADNESS.

BY RICHARD S. STORRS, D.D. [CONGREGATIONAL], IN THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS, BROOKLYN.

Strength and gladness are in his place,—
1 Chron. xvi: 27.

WE sometimes hear a strain of music which seems to be carefully, artificially elaborated, in which, with all its richness, we do not feel the expression of spontaneous liberty, or recognize the spring of a great motive. In poetry, too, we may detect, amid all its ornamentation, a lack of this vivid, vital