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Open Windows

Rose Porter



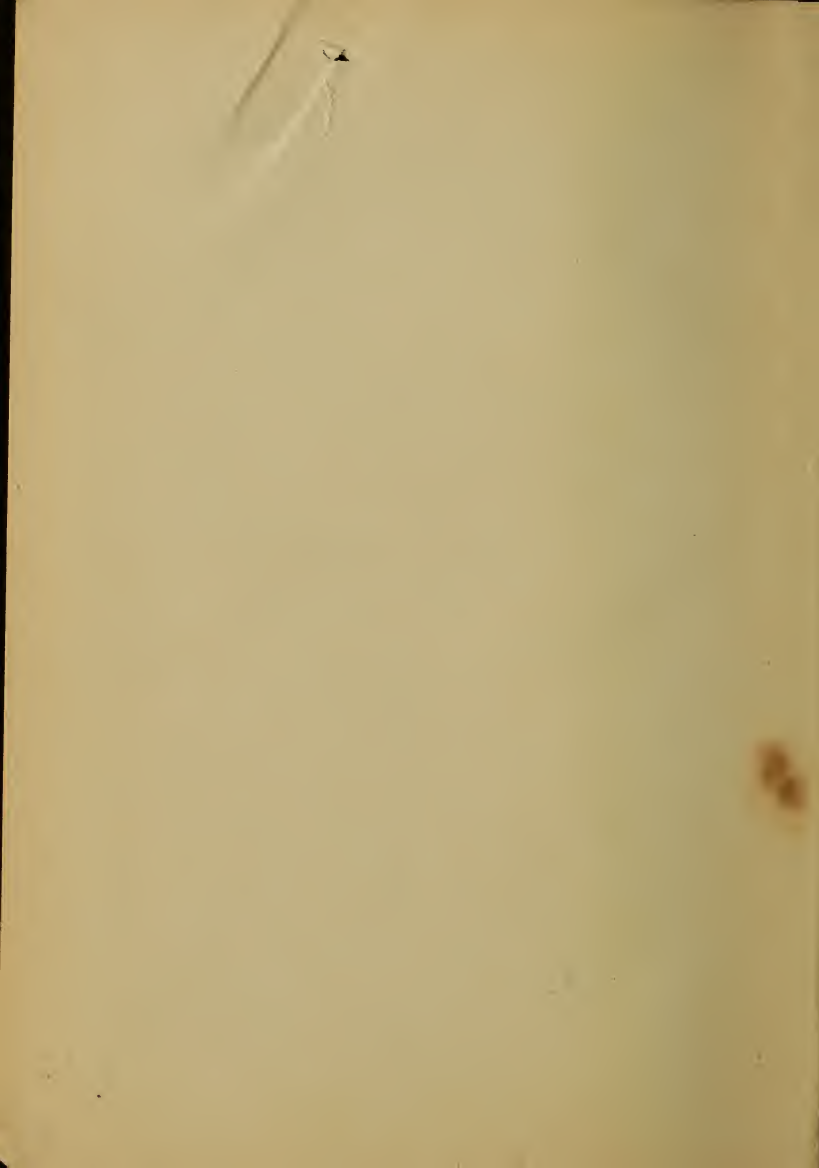


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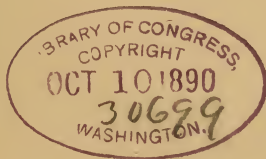
A

HEART-TO-HEART DIARY.

(SERIES ** OF "IN QUIETNESS AND IN
CONFIDENCE.")

BY ROSE PORTER,

Author of "Summer Driftwood"; "Winter Fire"; Etc.



NEW YORK:
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & COMPANY,
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OPEN WINDOWS.

“ Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing.”

MALACHI iii. 10.

Remember :

“ God illumines those who think often of Him, and lift their eyes toward Him.”

JOUBERT.

“ This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

PHIL. iii. 13-14.

I.

OPEN WINDOWS.

AS children seek flowers when spring comes, spreading its mantle of bloom over all the land, so let us to-day, dear H—, go forth and look for the Windows that open Heavenward.

Verily, I think we will find them unveiled for faith's eye to scan their farthest reach, and our beholdings will be as varied as the blossoms that star hill-side and meadow, shady nook and sunny field, when April glides into May, and May speeds on to June. For, truly, words are too narrow to span the comforts that come in-flooding the soul with light, even at darkest hours, in response to the earnest cry: "Thou art my lamp, O Lord; lighten my darkness."

But this illumining of dark places will not come all at once. No, spiritual sight is too progressive for that, hence the emblem

of sunrise so often applied to its expanding, increasing radiance. You know the way of sunrise—first the gray dawn, the break of day, and then a kindling glow on the highest mountain peaks—a glow that descends in ever growing brightness from hill-top to hill-top, till at last the remotest lowland valley catches a reflection of the glory, and all the world is bathed in the radiance of God's daily repeated command, "Let there be light." This is nature's story, and the soul's history repeats it, save for the fact that full radiance is not our portion here, for *that* we must wait till earth is exchanged for Heaven, for here always there will be an horizon-line to shut us in. Nevertheless we will seek the windows that are open—beginning by the suggestions of comfort and support—which in-shine in consolation beams for the hour we all must meet—the hour when "death comes up into our windows."

As we ponder this great mystery—mortal death as the birth of immortal life—we will use the word in its common acceptance. I know there are those who look forward to it as a glad prospect, those who long for its

coming, whose faith is so clear shining, death is by them anticipated with no more dread than "the passing from one room into another." But you tell me, dear H——, you are not one of those thus blessed with a "willingness to depart." You tell me you fear dying, and I think there is nothing wrong in your feeling; certain I am it is the most universal way of regarding departure. And it is but natural that the human heart should shrink before the profound mystery of the silence which no voice has ever yet broken—from which none have ever yet come back to tell us the way it leads. Yes, it is all strange, unknown, and its inevitableness, its exceeding vagueness, its exceeding loneliness of familiar companionship, all combine to fill the heart with trembling awe; and I repeat, surely this is not wrong, for nothing in Holy Scripture indicates that God condemns it—on the contrary, much goes to prove that our Lord Himself regarded it as a crucial test for the timid faith of His followers.

Hence He has richly strewn the pages of the Old and New Testaments with promises of Divine help, providing a full store of

dying grace for the dying hour. But we need not be discouraged because we cannot grasp that grace in advance, for it will surely be granted us with the need for it—then all will be well; and what we have to do now is “to trust that the love which has met the needs of busy life many a time with unexpected and surprising adaptations, will, when the time comes, and the necessity is close at hand, give the needed grace to die.” And now let us gather up and meditate on the repeated assurances of our Saviour’s nearness, which can illumine the dying hour with the light of Life Eternal. Think of His strength-giving promises—“Fear not, I will be with thee.” “Lo! I am with you always.” You shall be “delivered from the burden of the flesh”; “corruption shall put on incorruption”; “mortality shall put on immortality”; “you shall obtain joy and gladness”; “sorrow and sighing shall flee away”; and “God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.” Tell me, do not these thoughts open a window toward Heaven

—its out-look all peace? Surely they are given to help us on our way Thitherward, and yet, how solemn a thing it is to remember, our thoughts of Heaven are wont to correspond to our spiritual life. If you look deep into your own heart you will know this, and you will have a sight of the real Heaven for which you long. “Examine that, and it will show you precisely your spiritual position, just as the traveller knows his latitude by looking at the north star, and noting its distance above the horizon. What are the aspirations that go up from the profound within you? What sort of a world would you make for yourself, if you could have everything your own way, and embody around you your own best imaginations? Answer this question honestly, and your idea of Heaven is defined to you, and you will see whether it be carnal and selfish, or spiritual and pure.” I have wandered from your saying that there are other reasons beside the physical dread of dying, and the mystery of going out into the unknown that make you dread death. You tell me, there is the consciousness of sin, not only of the great omissions and commissions that,

like darksome caverns, fill so many places in the record of your life—but the vast course, too, of what may be called “lesser faults”; ill-temper, wrong thoughts, idle dreams, the half-wayness of repentance, the little love and praise, little real devotion you have rendered your Lord, languid prayers, dull meditations—all these voices of conscience come flooding your memory, and making your heart tremble, for all the while you knew the right and yet you chose the wrong.

Yes, dear—and so it is with us all ; hence, no wonder the heart fails when we come to know our life’s book is written full ; the last page turned, the last step taken, there is no time left to retrace even so much as one line, no time for struggle with, and victory over temptation, for we must go, just as we are.

But this is only looking at one side ; turn to the other and all is changed in a moment from darkness to light, from despair to hope ; for, there is one thing left we can do—we can cling to the Crucified ! Cling so close to His cross that in its shadow we will lose self and sin, giving *all* into His care, and He

is so willing to take it—so willing.—Then be not faithless, but believing—for neither death nor life can separate us from His boundless Love.—Oh! the window that Love opens for us—one look through its wide-flung curtain reveals enough to take fear away; for it shows us that He, the Christ, knows all about dying, knows even the agony of feeling the weight of sin; for though He was all sinless, for our sake He carried the burden of sin, and thus from us the load is taken. He knows, too, all the weariness and physical weakness and languor of dying. He passed through its vagueness and mystery that He might say to us, “Fear not”—for remember, “When from the Cross sounded His Voice, proclaiming, ‘It is finished,’ it meant the deepest darkness of death was finished for each of His followers. Henceforth not one would ever have to pass through it alone.” Oh, believe this, and “let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

As for the time and manner of our departure, let us seek to have no will of our own—it is so much the more peaceful way—and about dying, as about suffering, it is true,

“The law of pain is Love alone,
The wounding is to heal.”

We can safely trust and leave all with Him, who “has appointed a set time”—and who will, when that time comes, remember us, and be very near us—for “I have graven thee on the palms of my hands, saith the Lord.”

Faber’s hymn, “Wishes about Death,” is so full, so fragrant with the restful calm, the quietness and confidence of leaving all to Christ, and yet being true to self in natural desire, thinking you may not know it, I will copy it for you, verse by verse :

“I wish to have no wishes left,
But to leave all to Thee :
And yet I wish that Thou shouldst wish
Things that I wish should be.

“And these two wills I feel within
When on my death I muse :
But, Lord, I have a death to *die*,
And not a death to choose.

“Why should I choose ? for in Thy love
Most surely I descry
A gentler death than I myself
Should dare to ask to die.

- “ But Thou wilt not disdain to hear
What these few wishes are
Which I abandon to Thy love,
And to Thy wiser care.
- “ Triumphant death I would not ask,
Rather would deprecate :
For dying souls deceive themselves
Soonest when most elate.
- “ All graces I would crave to have
Calmly absorbed in one—
A perfect sorrow for my sins,
And duties left undone.
- “ I would the light of reason, Lord,
Up to the last might shine,
That my own hands might hold my soul
Until it passed to Thine.
- “ And I would pass in silence, Lord,
No brave words on my lips,
Lest pride should cloud my soul, and I
Should die in the eclipse.
- “ But when and where, and by what pain,—
All this is one to me ;
I only long for such a death
As most shall honor Thee.
- “ Long life dismays me, by the sense
Of my own weakness scared ;
And by Thy grace a sudden death
Need not be unprepared.

“One wish is hard to be unwished—
That I at last might die
Of grief, for having wronged with sin
Thy spotless Majesty.”

What!—after all this—do you again tell me you fear “because you are a sinner”?—Dear, did I not tell you He has bidden us leave ourselves with Him?—and sin is a part of self.

But you say, “the wages of sin is death.” Yes—but His Love in its fulness of forgiveness and redemption has paid those wages for us—it is Love like an ocean ; fathomless to any plummet ever yet discovered by the wisest man this world has known. Can you not trust that Love? Can you not believe in victory over sin through our Lord Jesus Christ? Try to remember, “He hath overcome the sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of Heaven for all believers”; thus the question is—not the magnitude of your sinfulness—but—do you believe?—“He hath opened the kingdom of Heaven.” What a window this promise, through which comes the in-shining brightness of the Sun of Righteousness.

Think of the “kingdom of Heaven,” and

what it means—and remember, in Christ's use of the words the light falls from above down on to our daily life, for they are linked with a thought of service here below.

Yes—the kingdom of Heaven belongs to *now* as truly as to the blessed Hereafter.

You will catch my meaning, if you repeat the Lord's prayer—"Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come on earth as in Heaven"—for this is a petition that asks not for flight into the Heaven above, but for entrance into Heaven here and now—the spiritual Heaven whose realm is in the soul, and of which Christ tells us, saying—"Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven; whosoever therefore shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven." Hence, what we have to seek is child-likeness of spirit, and that we may know what that is, windows of interpretation are set wide open on every side; dull indeed must we be to miss their meaning, and yet we need to be careful lest we over-look the difference Scripture so plainly notes between childishness and

child-likeness. You know the characteristics of a childish soul—self-confidence, selfishness, lack of stability, fretfulness, waywardness ; and you know, too, how unlike they are to the child-likeness which is marked by trustfulness, submission, and the sweet simplicity of a heart pure in thought and intent. And to have a soul full as a garden of flowers with such sweet traits, is to have the kingdom of Heaven within, and we may have it—no matter how far, according to time's counting of years, we have passed beyond the limits of childhood, for to souls there is no such thing as old age ; return to the true spirit of child-likeness is always possible—and by thus returning we come into harmony with the law of growth, for childhood is a type of growth,—and then—think of the sequel to all this !—When growth has come to the limit God sets for each soul to attain through the discipline of life, then we pass on to that Higher Heaven where the soul's language will ever be the child's "Abba, Father."

For child-likeness does not end here, it is so truly a part of the ever abiding "Faith, Hope, and Love" which reach on and on be-

yond our power to follow, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

All this leads us round again, to the promise, "He hath opened the kingdom of Heaven"; but now, we seek not the in-ward, but the on-ward looks which take us close to the Border-land of the Heavenly Country, where there is no more dying. Knowing this, surely we need not fear either to let our dearest go, or to go ourselves in response to the call bidding us leave this world for the next—for—He who thus calls is the One "who has tasted death for every man"—He, whose name is Jesus, and "He shall save His people from the power of the grave." Remember, He has promised to be "the strength of your heart," and "His strength is made perfect in weakness." Death here is a mere gate leading to Life There—for, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." How the emblem truth of that verse is all aglow with life—kindling the dying here

with beams of radiance from the living There. And, of these beams of light that fall aslant the Hereafter the Bible is so full. If you will but read it with a mind wide awake to find the passages which make immortality real, I think your heart will be filled with gladness, and with wonder, too, at the openings Heavenward—for, truly, “the windows of Heaven do open,” and in the hope of all they reveal, how the Future broadens! And silence, too, grows full of music, for we begin to know what the words mean which tell, “you shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy.” Only have faith—then the promise is so sure, “ye shall obtain”—even as they, our dear ones, have obtained entrance into the Heavenly Home—for, while there is much veiling of the “Other Shore,” Christ’s own words assure us they who have heard His call, and gone, are at Rest now, safe Home—with Him—for His prayer was—“Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given Me, be *with Me, where I am.*”

Truly there is no love like the love of Jesus—no solace so tender as the comfort He gives, when He lets us gaze through

the window that opens toward the "green pastures and the still waters" of the land into which our beloved have entered. Only they who have held the hand of the precious departing one, till verily they have let it go, because Christ's Hand has led within, can know the full, sacred, holy meaning that haloes the death of His Saints.

Such in-looks belong to the glorious liberty and light of the children of God, for by them we behold with the eye of faith "the Heavens open and the Son of Man, Jesus our Mediator, sitting on the right hand of God"—and where He is, they are—our dearest—His Saints! When in the night of sorrow God grants us such an onward look, it is as when a storm suddenly clears away, and stars shine through the rifts in the clouds; and then we know, too, what it means to hear "songs in the night."—That is the Old Testament promise of consolation. And the New echoes it in the words, "sorrowing yet rejoicing."

Ponder for a moment those promised songs, and remember they are not blossoms out of sunshine, like flowers, but they are night songs, born out of sorrow, of which

darkness stands as the type ; and yet, though we learn them through trouble, they are full of the music of comfort, *for*, "God giveth them."—"The God, who is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble."—"The God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations." And because of this comfort we "glory in tribulation," we can even sing, for "the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble : and—He knoweth them that trust Him." He has promised, "as one whom his mother comforteth, *so* will I comfort you." In "His love and His pity He will redeem." And, you will find, as life goes on, that "the Gethsemane places have done more for you than the Mount of Transfiguration"—and that "God's comforts are always greater than our troubles."

It is, too, by acquiescing in God's will we learn to thankfully—yes, thankfully—accept trouble, since He permits it, and thankfulness is another word for song—and "every sorrow brings a peace with it."

How can your heart enter into harmony with this? I know but one reply to give you—and that is, do not seek for the songs

or the peace, *but* seek Him who giveth them, and they will be the outcome of His felt Presence in the soul, as sure as sunrise is the outcome of day-dawn. This is how we Christians live "sorrowing yet rejoicing lives," and the turning to Him in our midnight grief is like passing from darkness to light—hence the songs come unbidden, not because we seek them, I repeat, but because we seek the God who gives them. When He thus fills the soul, then, as at the coming of the morning, the birds of the air break forth with song, so our hearts sing; and the simpler, the fuller our trust in Christ, the fuller and sweeter the songs. This leads me to repeat what I said in a former meditation—hence we do not welcome suffering for what *it is*, but for what *it does!*—and nothing is so wont to lead *near* to God as sorrow. And now your next query is, "How can you find windows of Heaven opening?" My reply must again seem a repetition, for all I can tell you is—not by seeking them through the experience of others—for God gives to each one of us a special revelation, and we can only come to that revelation by accepting the conditions of our

surroundings, and doing our duty in them faithfully and trustfully; and—you will forgive the warning—this is a place where there is always danger of giving “an undue prominence to the blessed and glorious work that has been done for us without us, to the exclusion of the equally blessed and all-important work which must be accomplished within us before we can be meet for the Heavenly inheritance that has been purchased for us, and to which we can have no possible claim but the unmerited mercy of Jesus Christ.” This being so, the fullest answer I can give to your query of how to obtain Heavenward glimpses, is the simple reply, live near to the Source of Light; for the closer we keep to that Light, the more we see; dark places grow so plain in its illumining; mists so vanish before its shining. Yes, wonderful as it is, if we live near Christ, like Stephen of old, we may see the “Heavens opened.” But, for such a blessed seeing, we must have Stephen’s spirit, we must look “steadfastly up into Heaven.”

Another window of Comfort that Christ has opened wide for us, is the blessed sure-

ness we have through His death and resurrection—which is the pledge of ours—that we will meet our dear ones in Heaven. Only for *now* is the parting. Among the Bible records that serve to make this most sure, how clearly defined against the blue sky of the Gospel narrative is the appearing of Moses and Elias on the Transfiguration Mount—where we are told “they talked of the Lord’s decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” What a token this, that while our eyes are holden from the joy of seeing our beloved, they may yet see us—and have knowledge to some extent of what is going on here on earth—and of what is to be our future. Think, too, of the glimpse that record gives of the resurrection of the body—for they both “heard” and “spoke.”

This leads us to the window widest open of all, for through it shines that most blessed assurance of Life Hereafter, which is revealed by Christ’s words: “I am He that liveth.” Liveth!—that is a promise of perpetual life: there is no echo of death in it. And it is a life which reaches out and enfolds every one of us—stamping with permanency all love that is “love in Christ.”

This makes friendship such a blessed lasting thing, with no break in its real linking of heart to heart, even though for a time we be separated—the one from the other. A lasting thing, I repeat, lasting beyond our *now* power of conception—for who can span eternity by a thought?—Who can limit the growth of an endless affection? And the deeper and fuller the heart we love, the surer we become of this truth of love's immortality, for it is the most earnest souls that bear the richest testimony that this life is not all. And, as though to make this even more certain, we have but to look from the heart of friendship on to the revelations made plain by the life of Christ, for there we see Love triumphing over mortal death, as truly as Life triumphs over the grave. If for a time, in the first agony of the wrench of parting from our dearest, we cry out in doubt of this—"Lord, tell me, will we meet again?"—softly as the dew falls on flowers in the gloom of midnight darkness, we hear in reply, the tender whisper of the "Still, Small Voice"—"Thy brother *shall* live again!" And—the crown to that promise, you know it—for "Christ

has Risen!" and His empty tomb has become the pledge to us that the grave does not hold the dear souls of those gone before us, who, through His redemption and resurrection "are not dead, but alive forevermore."

How like a warm hand-clasp of comfort for the deepest depth of grief comes this knowledge, even though it leads us to the sepulchre in the garden. A place where we need to tread very softly, for it is holy ground—so holy, much of silence and mystery veils it. Nevertheless, since the dawning of the Resurrection day, though it be a path leading by the way of graves, we know it is "God's acre," and its onward is the "Many-Mansioned Home," of which Christ said, "I go to prepare a place for you." For, though graves have been no less since that day, they are no longer tight-sealed and stone-guarded. No—when the stone was rolled from our Saviour's tomb, henceforth stones were rolled from all graves, whatever be the sorrow they mark, and on-looks were granted beyond the "dying and the weeping."

Such wonderful on-looks—for so tender

Is the Saviour's pity for us, He even "maketh intercession," that these looks may penetrate on to the blessedness of which He says, "that they may behold my glory." And, "because the Father loves, the Son's prayer of Love is granted." For *Love* is the other side of the grave!

Remember when sorrow comes—that other side—*Love, and Home!*—I often wonder what we would do amid the fragmentary, broken places of this uncertain existence which is at best

"A wave, a shadow, a breath, a strife,
With change and change forever rife."

How we could bear it, were it not that the Hope given by "Him who was dead and now liveth forevermore" bridges over our uncertainty, and is planted firm within the golden gate through which we will "for Christ's sake" pass at last.

Yes, dear H——, for you and for me the gates will open, though now they seem so close shut; we may—wonderful thought—even this very hour stand within their enclosure; we may be "nearer Home,"—"nearer now than we think."

You ask me, before we leave this subject, to look with you through "the window of prayer"—and you prelude your request by the question, "What is prayer?" Old Bunyan's definition is, "Prayer is the pitcher that fetches water from the brook." If this be so, surely a window is open in Heaven from which light descends to make clear the reflections mirrored in the "brook in the way," whose waters are replenished by the prayers of God's pleading children.

A full gleam of radiance shines, too, on the spirit of submission, which is the key-note of true prayer. For if we follow our "great Exemplar in Prayer" we must say, "Thy will, not mine, be done." Perseverance is another bright shining wavelet; and here, also, we have our Lord's example—for He offered one prayer three times, and surely we learn from His frequent resorting to the refuge of prayer that it is the best preparation for trial. But the dearest place to which the thought of our praying Lord leads, is the example He gives that we may plead for our precious ones, even as He prayed for His own. "What a blessing, too, is the spiritual telegraphy of prayer! We

never pray alone, but encircled by those whose wants are dear to us, and our prayers are buoyed up by the wants and aspirations of those who mingle in them. It is such a privilege to thus go to God with the importance which linking others' wants to ours gives to our petitions." What out-reaching that extract suggests!—Let us look at prayer, too, from a backward view, and recall how "the practice of prayer is co-extensive with the idea of religion"; for "wherever man has believed a higher power to exist, he has not merely discussed the possibility of entering into converse with such a power: he has assumed as a matter of course that he can do so." "Sacrifice begins at the very gate of Eden. The life of early Patriarchs is described as a 'walking with God'—a continuous reference of thought and aspiration to the Father above." How this early-felt need of communion through prayer points on to the time when "the new revelation was made in Jesus Christ," and when "there was little to add to what was already believed as to the power and obligation of prayer beyond revealing the secret of its acceptance." Think, too, of our Lord's

precepts and example ; they are sufficiently emphatic. And His apostles appear to re-resent prayer not so much as a practice of the Christian life as its very truth and instinctive movement. The Christian must be "continuing instant in prayer"; he must "pray without ceasing." One word more from this author's thoughts, and I think you will call the window of prayer wide open. It is—remember, "prayer is emphatically religion in action. It is the soul of man engaged in that particular form of activity which presupposes the existence of a great bond between itself and God. Prayer is, therefore, nothing else or less than the noblest kind of human exertion. It is the one department of action in which man realizes the highest privilege and capacity of his being. And, in doing this, he is himself enriched and ennobled almost indefinitely : now, as of old, when he comes down from the mountain his face bears tokens of an irradiation which is not of this world."

We have dwelt much in this little diary on the lesson of "sorrow" and of "service"

—and yet you ask me, before we come to its last page, to point you to still another window through which you may view them both by gazing Heavenward. In reply, for “sorrow,” I copy words from Robertson, for they flood with light to my mind, and I think will to yours, the truth that sorrow’s mission is the development of a higher spiritual life. “Sorrow is not an accident, occurring now and then; it is the very woof which is woven into the warp of life. God has created the nerves to agonize and the heart to bleed; and before a man dies, almost every nerve has thrilled with pain and every affection has been wounded. The account of life which represents it as probative is inadequate: so is that which regards it chiefly as a system of rewards and punishments. The truest account of this mysterious existence seems to be that it is intended for the development of the soul’s life, for which sorrow is indispensable. Every son of man, who would attain the true end of his being, must be baptized with fire. It is the law of our humanity, as that of Christ, that we must be perfected through suffering. And he who has

not discerned the divine sacredness of sorrow, and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is. The cross, manifested as the necessity of the highest life, alone interprets it."

As for the window that looks toward the prophecy held in service, it is not far to seek—for, as indolence is always like a moth in its subtle but sure destruction of energy, steadfast earnest service is a correspondingly sure indication of advance; and all advance in the spiritual life is an open window showing as its sign that the same mighty conqueror who was victorious over the grave, will be triumphant in the overcoming of spiritual death in our souls if we earnestly seek to serve Him.

And service is something with which *all* life is hedged in, since it can be rendered by a passive obedience as well as active—and though "it is by active performance of service for others, that self is most wont to be cast out of sight, and unselfish love to our neighbor expanded," yet quiet and seemingly uneventful lives offer plenty of opportunities for this, too. For, there is always the conflict with sins around us, and within,

and I know no better way of pointing toward the window that struggle with temptation opens, than that which Farrar tells—when he writes: “He who tempers the wind to the shorn Lamb, tempers also the temptations to the weak soul.

“He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust. Oh, in that heromultitude who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, think not that there are only the dauntless, and the powerful, the great in heart and the strong in faith: no, there are many of the weak and timid, many of the obscure and the ignorant, many of the shrinking and the suffering there. We saw not, till they were unfolded for the flight of death, the angel wings.”

The window through which weariness looks Heavenward!—its prospect is all Rest—that blessed rest they know, who serve Him day and night with never a need to say—“I am tired.”—

And, now, we will take just one glance through the window Paul throws so wide for all believers, when he writes: ‘This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto

those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus."

Words, these, that portray the heritage that only belongs to the Christian! even the right to forget the past—and in that forgetting we find a window opening toward the future that is verily as full of promise as the bud is the promise of fruit.

But remember there is but one way given by which we are enabled to forget—and that is, by reaching forward; for the object of each experience is the fitting the soul for another, while the thing we accomplish is always of so much less importance in God's sight, than what we become through its developing power.

This constant progress, constant "stepping-Heavenward," is so the mark of true soul life, for the command, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward," is as much a command for us now, as it was for God's children of old; and just as they had nothing to do with the land of bondage after they had passed its confines, so we have nothing to do with our *past* when we have given our hearts to Christ, for we gave

that to Him, too—and, spite the sins that stain its record—He has promised, “sins shall be blotted out, remembered no more,” hence they are not for us to recall. And, certainly, with whatever of good there may have been in our by-gone, we have nothing to do—He will take care of it—our path is all forward!

I think this is why such a deep significance is given in the Bible to “looking back”—and why the emblem of death is set as a warning against it. You remember Lot’s wife dead—dead—only in punishment for a backward look!—No wonder this solemn lesson has stood a type of spiritual death, through the ages that have come and gone since the angel voice proclaimed—“Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, escape to the mountains.”

Do you ask, what I think the prize Paul sought—and which, in following his example, we are to seek?

Likeness to Christ, is my reply; thus it is always something beyond us, for the more like Him we become, the fuller and deeper is our knowledge of what He is, and the more eager grows our reaching

forth after likeness to Him. Yes—surely this was the prize Paul desired—for it was not Heaven he sought, Heaven was in his heart already. It was not to be saved—for of salvation he was already assured through the love of Christ—hence, plainly, we see it was likeness to the great Example.

And with such a prize set before him, how could he help “counting all things but loss that he might win”? Ah! well might he term it “a high calling.” And lest we be discouraged as we strive to run this race, not *perfection*, but *faithfulness* is made the test of success; while being perfect is always the open window toward which faithfulness points, granting us through it, even now, glimpses of the blessed hereafter, when we shall all “wake up in His likeness”: when we shall enter within “the veil whither the forerunner—Jesus—is already entered for us.”

And so, dear H——, all we have to do is to run with patience “the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” And not looking for what the world calls success—for that our Lord never promised us in this life. No, He

said—"In the world ye shall have tribulation." Nevertheless, He bade us "be of good cheer." Hence this is a command that we must read in the same way that we look at a rough transparency, whose inequalities reveal naught but a broken surface as we gaze down on it, but which, when held up for the light to illumine, becomes a beautiful picture; just as tribulations held up toward the light become transparent and full of Love's revealing. And those rays of Light—remember, they are to be on-reaching, even to the including others in their brightness. How beautiful and precious the hope that in-shines through this window.—Think! "others toiling, striving, suffering as we, will catch from us in the days to come, some touch of tender, helpful comfort, if now, in the hour of trial, we hold fast to God and to holiness."

You remember, dear H——, we prefaced this our "open window" meditation by the emblem held in sunrise; let us now seal it with the emblem of sunset—a metaphor no less meaningful. Not a cloudless sunset, when the world is flooded with the shimmer of a pale uniform light, but

one heralded by cloud heaped high on cloud, for it is then that each catch a sun-beam that reveals a special ray of glory, bringing out now one and then another "sun and cloud" tinting of rainbow radiance, till at last the earth as well as sky is aglow with brightness.

A meaningful type, I repeat, for thus it is with the sorrows and trials of life; through the shining on them of God's care for us they each and every one become a separate beam, till at last before the full glory of His Love and Light they roll away and the "Windows of Heaven" open with no shadow between our upward gaze, and His down-shining brightness.

May "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and thus show us the Light"—even the light of His countenance. And He will, if in faith we seek it, for Christ said—"I am the Light of the world." Walk, then, as a child of light, "in quietness and confidence wherein is strength."

"Almighty God, who showest to those that are in error the Light of Thy truth, . . .

and who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant unto Thy people that they may love the things which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou dost promise : that so among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may surely There be fixed, where our true joys are to be found ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen ”

THE AGE WE LIVE IN.

“ We all with open face, beholding as in a glass the
glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image
from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

2 COR. iii. 18.

‘ Says God : Who comes to me an inch through doubt-
ings dim,
In blazing light I do approach a yard toward Him.’

ORIENTAL POETRY.

II.

THE AGE WE LIVE IN.

I AM in full sympathy with you, dear H——, in regard to what you say about “religious truth and controversy.”

Yes, you are right, the very air nowadays seems pulsating with what is called “new theology,” “progressive thought,” “advanced views,” and “widening out-looks.”

But while I agree with you that there are grave dangers in all this, I think there are great blessings, too, and always there is the safety-place to which we may flee, for “*God’s Truth is one and abiding.*”

Nevertheless, the present bewilderment in the breaking up of “creed authority” must present a serious phenomenon to all earnest minds, marked as it is by modern individualism.

“How are we to account for it?” you ask.

The universally acknowledged fact that

“religion is an indispensable part of man’s moral and mental out-fit,” suggests one reply : and two causes have contributed to deepen this conviction in modern times. Canon Liddon tells us : “The first is the subjective spirit of the age which insists on looking at truth, not as it is, in its utter independence of the mind of man, but as it presents itself to man’s mind, or rather as man’s mind in very varying moods approaches it. This spirit, while it has weakened the public hold upon creeds and Scriptures, has directed attention with an intensity unknown before our day, to the needs of the human mind, and among them to its supreme need of a religion.”

He further writes : “The indispensable-ness of religion to human life has also been forced on the mind of this generation by a deeper study of history.” You will see the truth of this statement, if you sum up the most important historical events, for you will then see how “the most profound and far-reaching changes have really turned upon religious questions.”

Recall, too, that saying of Goethe’s, “The deepest subject in the history of the world

and of mankind, and that to which all others are subordinate, is the conflict between faith and unbelief."

Realizing all this, we see interest in religion is inevitable among the thoughtful of our day and generation. But the practical question is, "What is it that man seeks in seeking religion?" And this brings us to one of the "signs of the time" that troubles you, because it seems lacking in the earnest reverence with which you fain would have all sacred topics encompassed.

You say, "The most holy truths, from familiar discussion have come to be tossed about in conversation with a careless irreverence that thinks more of the theories and opinions to be maintained than of the vital truth that makes their real value."

Yes—I know this is so, but, for you, as well as for myself, it need not trouble us if we keep within the Shadow of His Hand, within the sound of His "still, small voice," whose faintest whisper can calm all the din and turmoil of mere opinion.—And what are opinions but a result of views, and hence limited by spiritual outlook. It is well to remember this, for in the matter of

“religious views”—which I think a strictly accurate philosophical expression—new impressions and ideas come crowding in on us, just as they do when we look out over some wide land or sea view, and need to wait, before we can adjust “near and far” into their own true places—for so we need to wait, before we pronounce decidedly on subjects of which even the wisest are slow in judging.

And as we wait, let us remember, “there may be absolute and higher truth of which what we know is only the shadowed outline; we cannot reach it now—but it is there, ready for us behind the veil.”

And at best, what can we prove? Tennyson’s words are so true:

“ For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven: wherefore then be wise,
And cling to Faith, beyond the forms of Faith !
She reels not in the storm of warring words,
She brightens at the clash of ‘ Yes ’ and ‘ No. ’
She sees the Best that glimmers thro’ the Worst,
She feels the Sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the Summer thro’ the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain, where they wailed, ‘ Mirage ! ’

Hence, I bid you hold your mind open to truth, even though it may come to you at the cost of your pulling down a hoard of maxims, and close clinging to the *letter* of the law rather than the *spirit*—a state of mind that I call, for lack of a better term, a sort of framing in of your traditional conscience. Do not infer from this that I mean *speculation* is truth, or that systems of thought are to be received as God's revelation. But what I want to recognize is, that there is danger in a too determined clinging to the "old ways," as well as danger in an undue reaching out after the new. For the one is apt, as we grow in years, to develop into superstition, while the other, without prayerful watching, will end in scepticism.

Let us then, dear H——, hold fast to the "faith once delivered," but let us "add to faith, knowledge." And a generous willingness to welcome what of good has grown out of the wide study and enlarged thought of the present age. As I write this, I feel I need the warning, perchance, more than you do, for I am a very conservative by nature, prone to abjure theories, and I will con-

fess it has always, and does now seem to me, that those who simply and trustfully do the *present* duty, are wont to be clearer-sighted in the spiritual life, than those whose vision ranges far. For, there is always the risk, that in searching for great things, we may overlook the present, and the command is for day by day living. Nevertheless, the world has need for the far seekers, as well as the near, and to whichever party we belong, it is well for us to be wide awake to the good contained in the other.

But let us turn from these ponderings, which savor of unrest in a certain way, and instead of them, listen for a while to the whispers of the voice in the soul—and, if those whispers lead us round to the same thoughts, we need not fear to follow their guidance, for it is the Holy Spirit that leads by them.

How still they are, these Spirit whispers, and so powerful! Silent as sunlight, yet transmuting the material into the spiritual, bidding us penetrate like the warm rays of sunshine beyond and beneath the visible. That is a real “modern day” thought, do you tell me? Well, if it is, think of the be-

neath, where there is so much concealed! Think how diamonds lie hidden from sight year after year, and gold, deep imbedded under fathoms of rock and loam. Think, too, of the springs of living waters that are locked for centuries silent in fastnesses of the hills, and the deep caverns of the earth—and all these treasures are waiting for some touch, like that of Moses' rod, to set them free.

These thoughts are types, and yet types even when Bible-culled are well-nigh empty, till they become meaningful because of some linking with real life, that serves to illuminate their spiritual as well as their material side.

And, the "still, small Voice," how often it guides memory back over a silent stretch of years to some such life-like remembrance.

This very minute it brings to my mind a simple "all true" story, that holds in suggestion a lesson full of the portrayal of God's overruling Love revealed by the bringing to light one of the "beneath things." And because it points beyond the visible, I pass it on to you.

It leads to a far distant land and a time,

by-gone by many years. Our surroundings are all strange, "cannons to right, and cannons to left" of us. The siege of Sebastopol is at its height. The brave, undaunted band of battle-marred soldiers who for long have guarded one special point grow less in number with every passing hour. Long fasting—and the deadlier foe, thirst—doing a more fatal work than cannon-ball and bursting shell. And yet, in the hearts of those brave men hope died hard—but, thirst is cruel, and with it came despair—when—Hark!—through the parting air once again Russian shell follows shell, once again the earth is rent and torn, the crimson tide of life-blood flows fast—when—lo!—from the clefted sod up-wells a bubbling fountain!—water—pure and cool! And that life-spring, set free by an enemy's missile of death, never once failed while the siege lasted. To scores and scores of thirst-parched men it proved an almoner of life and refreshment. There is no need for me to point the meaning of this story, it tells its own lesson, and yet such stories are well to recall when one has been dwelling on the environment of the present day. For they

tell us, escape from the trammel of "why and wherefore" is found in a firm trust in the overruling care of Him who can cause water to up-spring in the desert, who can say to the wildest storm of doubt, "Be still," and there will be "a great calm."

And now, here we are round again to the fact that speculation, the spirit of questioning, like a huge interrogation-point on a blank page is the atmosphere of the age we live in. We cannot put this truth by—and would we if we could? I think not, for, thank God, if the waves that toss this questioning age be turbulent and restless, as mid-ocean billows, yet hearts and minds have grown broader by the very tossing. Faith's boundaries have widened, spite the fact that sometimes they *seem* narrowing. We have come to know,

" The love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

We have come to a clearer insight of the lines of progress, and see through perspective the real advance that has followed the

learning that where the questioning is *honest*, it may yield a richer harvest than that which ripens from a persistent clinging to "what one has been taught." Robert Browning expresses this in words that may seem to you somewhat harsh—still, I think you will acknowledge they are alive with the vigor of a healthy progressive life :

“ And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare : happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God’s contempt apart
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth’s paddock as her prize.

Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said.”

If all this involves a time of spiritual up-stirring, surely we can rest satisfied that a *higher order* will blossom out of it, just as the earth that is most stirred by plow and furrow, in the end brings forth the fullest fruitage.

As to the matter of unsettled creeds, if

we remember creeds, even the very best of them, are of man's making, how many a note of discord would be quieted, because louder than them all, sounds the Voice of Him, who summed up in so brief a space the first and great foundation principle of Christian life—love—love to God, and love to man.

Love!—it touches the key-note of a creed I pray God you and I may in very truth be able to preface with an "I believe."

Love!—ah, if that one word in all its fullness could stand as the capital letter of all creeds, how the spirit of opposition would die out for want of nourishment, the bitterness of discussion grow warm and fragrant with the incense that haloes Christ's "Love" command; for when love is the root, little does it matter whether the flower of worship be a blossom of liturgy, or of untrammelled speech.

And—what do disputes and differences of opinion, lengthy discussions, and clashing arguments as to that most vexed and mooted question, the Hereafter, amount to, before the greater question, Is thy heart right before God?

If we can answer that, standing in the full illumining of His promise, "Unto the upright there ariseth light," we need feel no fear of this questioning, restless age, for then our anchor is *Faith*. We can calm ourselves in the thought of the strong, steady Hand at the wheel, and holding that Hand, oh, how surely we know the waves wrecking about us never for one moment mean the parting of the strong planks of the Life-Boat in which we sail. For above the clash and the roar of howling winds and breaking waves, loud and clear as the song of a lark, rings out the Lighthouse bell—"Port is near." "The Haven is sure." "Hold fast, all is well."

Yes, very well; for even now,

"The lights are gleaming from the distant shore,
Where no billows threaten, where no tempests roar."

Does the glimmer of these lights make you long to go?

Yes—I know—many a time it is hard not to pray,

"Lord, loose the cable, let me go—"

But

"Hark the solemn answer,
Hark the promise sure,

Blessed are the servants who to the end endure !
Yet a little longer, hope and tarry on,
Yet a little longer, weak and weary one—
More to perfect patience, to grow in faith and love,
More my strength and wisdom, and faithfulness to
 prove,
Then the sailing orders the captain shall bestow—
Loose the cable, let thee go.”

I do not feel satisfied, dear H——, to leave this meditation without turning again for a moment to the thought that environment counts for much, hence we must meet the questions of this age we live in, for they are stirring around us like snowflakes falling thick and fast on a December storm day. Then, too, I so want you to feel the strength, the quietness, and confidence there is in meeting them with a firm trust in the great “I Am.” Out of this trust comes a power that enables the mind to discriminate between doubt and speculation, as the eager search of an earnest soul after light, and doubt and speculation as a mere indulgence of spiritual self-conceit, for there is a vast difference in the two.

I recall a lesson of wisdom on this very point, and the importance of being just in the reception of what may be to us new

thoughts. It was taught a company of ladies by one of God's dear saints, who went from earth to Heaven not many months ago.

Dispute ran high; the verdict pronounced on the young minister under discussion, and who had recently been called to fill a century and century-old gospel pulpit, was "too progressive," "too advanced."

Silently my old friend had listened, while one of those shrewd, yet kindly smiles that seem to belong to a fast passing generation, lit up her countenance. When at last she spoke, it was very quietly, and at first I thought her words far away from the subject.

"In my young days," thus she began, "voyagers across the wide Atlantic took passage in some staunch, white-winged sailing craft, and slow was the progress, requiring many a tack to eastward and to westward to catch every breath of the favoring wind." Just here she paused before adding: "But nowadays things are changed. Swift as a bird goes through the air, the steam-fed vessel spans the ocean miles. A voyage that once took weeks to

accomplish, now fills a time brief as from one Sabbath to the next."

Then came a pause again, while the smile on her face became more tender, as after a minute she continued: "And, somehow—I am thinking, though the old ways *are good* (she was too loyal to admit a past tense), the old ways are dear, yet if I were to start tomorrow for a land beyond the sea, you would not bid me set sail in some old-time 'ship of the line.' No, you would send me forth with a 'God-speed' in the very swiftest and the surest of the modern-built vessels that ply from shore to shore.—And—I am thinking"—unconsciously she seemed to repeat the words—"we should be as open-minded in acknowledging the good progress made in the spiritual world, where religious thought is leader, as we are to acknowledge the progress made in the material." And there was not one of all that company who said "nay" to my old friend's words.

And now by way of farewell to this subject, dear H——, I will let Canon Liddon speak to you again, for I much like the way by which he tells: "If man's religious wants are to be answered, his creed must speak, not

merely to his intelligence, but to his heart and will. He cannot really rest upon the most unimpeachable abstractions. He needs something warmer than the truest philosophy. He yearns to come in contact with a heart: and no religion, therefore, can really satisfy him which does not at least lead him to know and love a person. An unseen Friend, who will purify, and teach, and check, and lead, and sustain him:—that is his great necessity. And this want, this last but deepest want of man's religious life, Christianity has satisfied. As humanity, 'sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death,' pleads with the Power whom it feels, but cannot see—'Show Thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto Thee.' Lo! the heavens drop down from above, and the skies pour forth righteousness. And One fairer than the children of men presents Himself to all the centuries and centuries of the world with the gracious bidding: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'——only come."

WILDERNESS DAYS.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.”

MATT. iv. 1.

“O Soul of Jesus
Thy Spirit weighs the sins of man
And Thou hast struggled with it, Lord!
By the pains of Thy pure love
Grant me the gift of holy fear
Even when tempted, make me see.”

FABER.

III.

WILDERNESS DAYS.

“**I** WILL bring you into the wilderness.”

How like a special invitation that sounds, a special assurance of our Lord's own leading: “*I* will bring you”—but, ah! dear H——, think where it leads.

And—whether we will go or not is not asked—no, the words are, “will bring.” Temptation—for that is what this wilderness typifies for us—is something we must all meet; the only thing about it that is under our control is the yielding or resisting, and that involves conflict, for it is a struggle between the evil and the good which are implanted in every heart for the development of character. And, that we may have courage for this conflict, the companionship of our Saviour in times of trial is repeatedly promised. We are even told:

“He was in all points tempted like as we are.” But, ah! the difference!—He was “*without sin*”—while as for us!—who can number their sins?—Not either you or I. To return to the comfort and strength of Christ’s knowing all about temptation—except the yielding to it—have you ever followed this thought of the two-foldness that runs through Christian life?—making it a condition of being “alone, yet not alone.”

It shines with so bright a light on the complex truth that the Divine Helper is working with us, and yet, while our choosing good is the work of God, it is at the same time a work only accomplished through our own free determinate willingness to choose the good. This working of God and man together, stands out so clearly defined in the history of wilderness days, for truly temptations seem one of the plainest ways of revealing it, one of the most comforting too; for since our Lord was led into the wilderness, and trod every step of the way before us, if we seek His strength, the “strength made perfect in weakness,” after the trial-time we, you and I, may “come up

from the wilderness leaning on our Be-
loved." Listen to His invitation :

" Lean on me ! unchanging love
 Shall shield thee, in my warm embrace.
Lift up thy thoughts, thy hope's above,
 No frowns are on thy Saviour's face.
Art thou distressed with inward guilt
 When secret sins rise up to view ?
Forget not then, whose blood was spilt
 To cleanse, to sanctify, renew."

Lean hard, my child, dismiss thy fear,
 I will uphold."

Can you sing from your heart the last
verses of this simple hymn—

" Jesus, my Lord ! I know Thy Voice,
 On Thee with confidence I lean,
In Life, in death, my only choice,
 All hope, all wealth, in Thee are seen.

" Here will I lean, nor doubt Thy love,
 Or power to hold me safely up—
With heart and hope still fixed above,
 Humbly I'll drink Thy mingled cup."

Ah ! if you can truly sing them, then, verily,
the words, "come up, leaning on our Be-
loved," belong to you. "Come up"! the

very words proclaim advance—something is gained by the wilderness sojourn. The issue of temptation is upward toward victory. For Christ has made it possible for us to meet temptation with the hope of conquering. “We Christians can dare to face it, for He has brought us both a pardon and an antidote. His cross and passion are a revelation as well as a cure. . . . When dying He showed us what sin is. . . . Standing beneath the Cross, we can never deem moral evil less or other than the greatest, if it be not rather the only evil. Kneeling before the Crucified, be our sense of guilt what it may, we can never despair, since the complete revelation of the malignity of sin is also and simultaneously a revelation of the Love that knows no bounds.”

“It is these concrete truths, and no abstract considerations, which really keep alive in the Christian’s heart an abhorrence and dread of moral evil. With that evil, even when all has been pardoned, every Christian life is, from first to last, in varying degrees a struggle. There are great conflicts, and there are periods of comparative repose; there are days of failure, as well as days of

victory ; there are quickenings of buoyant thankful hope, and there are hours of discouragement which is only not despair. But two things a genuine Christian never does : he never makes light of any known sin, and he never admits it to be invincible. While he constantly endeavors, by the sanctification of his desires, by entwining his affections more and more around the Source of goodness, to destroy sin in the bud, or rather in its root and principle, he is never off his guard ; never surprised at new proof of his natural weakness ; never disposed to underrate either his dangers or his strength. He knows that now, as eighteen centuries ago, he wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers that bear him no good-will : he knows that as at the first, so now, ‘if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins.’ And thus, in his inmost life, he is at once anxious and hopeful : confident, yet without presumption ; alive to all that is at stake day by day, hour by hour : yet stayed upon the thought, nay, upon the felt presence of a Love which has not really

left him to himself. And at last, when it seems best to that Eternal Love, the day of struggle draws to its close, and the towers of the Everlasting City come into view: the city within whose precincts intellectual error cannot penetrate, and moral failure is unknown.”—“Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A long extract, dear H——, which I cull from the volume, quoted often before—Canon Liddon’s “Elements of Religion”—but if you read it carefully, I think you will find it none too long, for it will prove a helpful entrance to thoughts on the peculiar temptations that belong to our wilderness days. But, before we ponder them, let us pause to note the lesson of Israel’s wilderness mercies and wilderness wanderings, with an application to ourselves, for since the Old Testament as well as the New is for instruction, they must hold lessons for us.

And the wilderness through which God’s chosen people were brought, that they might “go up to the good land and take possession of it,” surely is a very striking emblem of our spiritual experience, for re-

member we are the Lord's spiritual Israel, and the wilderness stands as a type of the world through which we must journey, not escaping its temptations, but overcoming them, if we are to enter "the good land of promise," the Canaan which we can only reach as we pass over Jordan!

Passing over Jordan! The meaning held in that passing, how deep it goes, reaching down to the very root of self-love and self-will. For, though the metaphors are different, the underlying truth—death to self—is the same as that to which St. Paul referred when he said, "I die daily."

The death of self-will—no wonder we come to it by the way of the wilderness, for it dies hard.

No wonder the waters of the typical Jordan are cold and dark: no wonder we dread the entering into life through death, and yet we must do it if we are to be "made conformable to His death." But it is not death of which we are to think—no, it is life—for that is what our Lord imparts to us when we have passed over Jordan. Yes, life—for the promise is, not only that we shall abide "in Him," but that He "abides in us."

Remember, out of this abiding, comes the soul's communing with God, which reveals the secret of Divine wisdom. Think-- "out of the abiding of the Son with the Father flows the wealth of the Word's high knowledge. He knows—because He abides in the bosom of the Father. This is the law of intellectual life in its highest conceivable expression, in the Word, who is the Thought and Reason of God Himself: this law, then, regulates the exercise of reason from end to end of its domains: in this lies the secret of its force, the condition of its success: and we, on our lower level, we, whose reason works in the image of the Word, in whose light alone we see light, can win our intellectual way only through conformity to the primal conditions under which the Word of God moves forward to His victorious apprehensions. We can only understand that in which we abide, with which we have intimate union, to which we are ourselves conformed. . . . The closer our contact, the surer grows our knowledge: and only out of the growing pressure of familiar intercourse can our reason gain ever-quickenings activity, ever-

increasing assurance. . . . Its instinctive sympathies, its sense of security, its touches of persuasiveness, its effective presence, all vary infinitely, according to the character of its abiding habits, according to the range of its experiences."—Ah! if we can grasp what this abiding means, if we can but touch even the hem of this truth, with the touch of faith, we have indeed come near to the border of the "good land." And, by the power of His life—"Christ in us"—we can thus approach, we can know, at last we will overcome, though now, fight we must. We can rest assured also, that no upward flight of holiness is too far a reach for us to seek: no victory over temptation too hard for us to attain, since with Christ for our Risen and Living Lord, "all things have become possible." Hence, if we do not overcome, it is not because His power fails, but because we hold back from full consecration of our all to Him. The consecration which He bids us seek and find when He calls us, saying: "I will bring you into the wilderness, and I will plead with you face to face."

Do you ask—Why call that a wilderness, which leads to Christ's converse with the

soul intimate as the "pleading face to face"?

If you will recall His Gospel words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," I think you will straightway see one reason. For they bear the same interpretation as this Old Testament invitation. And they bring out very plainly that the rest promised even when the soul is called near to Christ, is of a relative kind, for it springs from the fact, that His yoke is easy, and yet it is a burden—is a yoke only made easy by His sympathy and love; it brings out the fact, too, that our rest here is in comparison with earth's unrest, and that in bearing His yoke, even though He is with us, helping us bear it, we still, like the children of Israel, find there is no swift speeding across the desert to the "rest and inheritance," for our way there is like the path they trod, "a long way, round about."

Do you catch my idea? It is, that in the Gospel the call, "Come unto me I will give you Rest," is distinct from the following verses: the one, having to do with the "Hereafter," the others with now: the

order being reversed from the Old Testament record, where first we encounter the thought of the wilderness, and afterward are granted the glimpse of the "promised land."

"Come unto Me." This is a call bidding us "leave the burden of mortal life, the sorrow of a sin-laden world, the weakness and the faulty character, the imperfect love of frail mortality; leave it all, and come—where? Not only to Heaven, not to your crown only, but to Me! and you shall find Rest, and that Rest shall be Heaven." We cannot, do not gain it here on earth, for the next verse tells us of the yoke and the burden, both involving continuance of labor and endurance, even though both are lightened by His Presence, and because of *that* Presence, while the discipline of life and temptation is a wilderness, "the desert is made to bloom," for "the beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him: and the Lord shall cover him all the day long."

If you spend an hour on the seashore you will understand this seeming contradiction of rest and unrest, for then you will see how, even amid the surging of the breaking

waves, there is still a peaceful under-rippling current. Yes, dear, wonderful as it seems, if Christ's Presence be recognized by us, this under-ripple of peace is always ours, however the upper waves may dash and roar.—But—the abiding calm, unbroken by either ripple or wave, that, in its completeness we can only know when at last we are safe Home, at anchor, within the Harbor of Heaven.

I used the word crown, in referring to the Saviour's call to the soul, and it leads me to note in passing that there is danger of misreading the verse : " Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." For, if we merely see in the words the promise of a crown if we are faithful until death, they become discouraging, filling the heart with forebodings of failure, and the mind with thoughts of self, in place of the peaceful assurance of hope, that is a sure outcome of trust in Christ ; hence I do not think it was thus our Lord meant them, but rather as test words, asking, would our faithfulness be steadfast, and willing to endure suffering, even agony keen as death, for His sake? If we would, then they are His

pledge of the blessed Hereafter which will be our crown of Life.

This is one of the many places where we walk in darkness if our faith only partially grasps the truth, that we only are complete *in* and *by* Him. But all is light if we depend on Christ for constant guidance, for then we do not try to bear alone the burden of being faithful, but we share it with Him, our Lord, who saves us not only from sin, but from its bondage.

The experiences I mention now may seem strange to you, for it is something of a contradiction, revealing that what is our greatest comfort may yet be our greatest humiliation.

It is that sometimes as we travel through this wilderness life, we become disheartened from the very fact of Christ's pleading with us "face to face." For it brings Him so near us, we see brought out in clearly-defined contrast our own unlikeness to the Divine Pattern. When it thus happens, remember, this very sight of the All-Perfect and our all imperfection is one of the wilderness ways, "to humble us, and to prove us"; for it shows what He is, and what we

are, making our after conduct a test of whether we really are in profound earnest in wishing to be like Him.

But it is humbling, I repeat, dust humbling, this finding how dull and slow we are in responding to His example, and so is our wandering from Him. And yet, how we do wander, sometimes so far that where the light about us has been a clear shining, suddenly we find all dim, while a mist, caused by our waywardness and straying, gathers in thick gloom, like vapor up-rising from some sickly morass. And we cannot see our Lord at all: nevertheless He is near.

But the wanderer must pay the penalty of straying, and before we find our way back to the safe "narrow path," we may have to seek and seek, even till weary and footsore, the sun beating on us by day, the chill damp of night enfolding us with "a darkness that can be felt"—and then—for our humbling still—we find Him; find He has never left us—but we were the ones who turned from Him.

There are other times, when "our Lord hides His face," not because of any fault of ours, but for the perfecting of our faith, and

that we may be fitted by His dealings for the object of them, the final receiving us "into glory." "Soldier and Servant"—it is a good motto for us wilderness-pilgrims, for we are called to fight the fight of faith, as well as to "walk in love, serving the Lord." And faith does oftentimes demand stern conflict, "the soul cannot satisfy itself with itself; it seeks some higher service. . . . And remember, faith will perish if we do not take care of it." It is not something we can plant in the soul, and then leave to grow. No, it needs the daily renewal of self-surrender, and daily seeking after the high service and devoted obedience of the children of God. If this is your desire, then listen to, and follow the "pleading" of "the sweet, low Voice that calls us out of ourselves, out of our vanities, out of our own ease, up to the higher obedience, up to the humility of sonship, up to the service of faith: that so nourishing and cherishing all the instincts that faith sets working within us, our faith may slowly perfect itself into that love of God which loves Him with all its mind, and all its heart, and all its soul, and all its strength."

And now, dear H——, you ask me to tell of the special "wilderness" you may be called to walk, living as you do a home and love-guarded life. It will doubtless be a wilderness leading into the realm of internal and spiritual temptations, rather than by the way of external and material. And yet, in meeting temptations, the same commands apply to both, though looking at them from a mere surface glance, it does not seem so. I recall once reading an illustration of this, which will serve to suggest the thought, though I cannot give it in the exact words used. The idea was in following the subtle working of temptation in its mental influence, take but the eighth commandment as an example, which holds good for a hundred other allurements: "Thou shalt not steal." Straightway you will say: "No need for me to pray to be delivered from that temptation, for never, in all my life, did I feel an impulse toward dishonesty."

But look a little deeper, and tell me, have you never been tempted to desire to seem a little better, a little truer, a little more charitable, a little more accomplished than you really are? Have you never given the

impression of possessions or position a little beyond the honest truth? And—is not the being willing to seem anything which you are *not truly*, disobeying the command, “Thou shalt not steal”?—For, are you not trying to steal the good opinion of others, by giving them an impression of worth where it does not exist?

Alas, how often we do steal in one, if not all of these ways—and others, akin to them—without giving hardly a thought to the “moral falseness” involved—sometimes even smiling at our own rare skill in putting what the world calls the “best foot foremost.”

Another of these subtle ways by which we are often tried is, we resist temptation because to yield would lower us in the estimation of others, not because of the right and wrong in question, and hence we gain nothing in a moral sense by our refusal; in fact, we lose in truth of character every time we *thus* conquer. For, while we may gain a certain strength toward resisting the evil when next it assails us, it is a mere surface gain, for “only as we refuse to yield because consent is sin in God’s sight, do we really gain in spiritual strength, and power

to close bar the door of our souls against future temptations."

Then, too, we are so wont to forget, that what we are to seek by the resisting of temptation is not deliverance from the penalty of wrong-doing, but from the *heart-sinfulness*, which leads us to desire to sin, making it even dear to us. How all this gives a profound emphasis to the truth, "the heart is deceitful."

Verily, victory over these subtle temptations, which, like all spiritual things, are difficult to grasp and hold, demands a keen intellectual effort, as well as prayerful seeking of Divine Help; this you will straightway see if you follow but the growth of one yielding. For it begins by a mental process, first the wish—and then the rounded thought—that reacts on the wish, pressing it forward, till desire gains mastery—and at last becomes a reality. Hence, to gain control over our wishes, is the way to gain control over thoughts, and when we have conquered so far as to hold sway over thoughts, we are well on toward that "great city, the Holy Jerusalem," of which it is written, "there shall in no wise enter into

it anything that defileth or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

Truth, honesty of soul—yes, it leads by a path all upward, and if we tread its heights, even here on earth, we can look on and over into "the good land of promise."

"O blest the land, the city blest,
Where Christ the Ruler is confest!

Fling wide the portals of your heart,
Make it a temple set apart,
From earthly use for Heaven's employ,
Adorn'd with prayer, and love, and joy:
So shall your Sovereign enter in,
And new and nobler life begin.

"Redeemer, come! I open wide
My heart to Thee: here, Lord, *abide!*
Let me Thy inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal,
Thy Holy Spirit guide me on
Until my glorious goal be won!"

But—before we reach that glad, blessed goal there are other wildernesses for us to encounter beside those typified by temptation—and those "other deserts" are so many, we will ponder them, dear H—, in a separate Meditation.

DESERT PLACES.

Remember,

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from Heaven to eat.”

JOHN vi. 31.

And,

“Thus saith the Lord, I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”

Is. iv. 3.

And the Christ. He took them, His own chosen disciples—“into a desert place.”

LUKE ix. 10.

IV.

DESERT PLACES.

YESTERDAY we pondered passing through the wilderness as a type of the soul's encounter with temptations in its journey through this world.

To-day, our thoughts lead to other experiences, that in their teaching of faith and patience, may well be called "desert places," and yet by knowing them, the heart is made ready for entrance at last into the King's own country—the dear Jerusalem the golden.

I need hardly tell you these deserts are varied as the clouds that speed between us and the blue sky, on an April day, when clouds above are well-nigh as many as the numberless waking flower-buds below, that spring up an hundred to a sod. For suffering is the appointed lot of all. And suffering! Who can count the ways by which

it comes? Since they are so multitudinous, only the trials that stand out in boldest relief, will we pause to note. Chief among them is poverty—for when one must work whether the head be aching, or the heart breaking, it makes of labor a “desert place.”

Ask the sons and daughters of toil, and they can tell you all about it. While as for sickness—truly it is a discipline that leads “apart into the desert.” But, thank God, the desert of sickness is one of the places where we may feel most sure the Christ will come, filling its gloom with His Presence. The record of His life on earth gives us this assurance, for think of His tender sympathy for all bodily suffering. And surely the Lord Christ is no less tender and mindful than the Man Christ! Think how “they brought unto Him many that were sick”: how we are told, not once, but again and again, “He was moved with compassion.” And His compassion, what an example it is for us to follow, going as it did deeper than mere sympathy—precious as that is—for it was blended with the active mercy of relieving,—“the blind re-

ceived their sight, and the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard."

From sickness our thoughts naturally pass on to the desert of parting. "One taken, the other left." Ah! that means a wilderness indeed; only they who have trod its desolate way know the barrenness of this "desert place."

And there is the desert of "living sorrows," the over-casting of a sun-bright sky, the turning of a flower-strewn path into the arid sand of the desert, because one we love has fallen from the ways of right to wrong, from honor to dishonor. Added to these trials are the numberless and the nameless anxieties and perplexities that belong to daily life. Conscience has dark places too, and remorse is a desert. And there are also the spiritual and mental deserts that follow swiftly on undue or self-conceited search into the "hidden things of God." But of them all the Lord saith, "I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert." And yet, before He does this, the years of discipline may be long as the typical "forty"! For from His Word we learn that trial is meant to be

trial, and that it must accomplish its full work. Christ said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman: every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it that it may bring forth *more* fruit."

Remember it is not enough to be a branch, we must also "bear fruit." And then, "the Lord purgeth"—for the sake of the "*more* fruit." Hence we will have to cross and re-cross the deserts appointed for our discipline and growth in grace as long as we stay in this world. For there is no passing beyond tears, no passing beyond the need for weeping, till we are called *There*, where "God shall wipe away all tears."

Till then poverty will be hard in detail, sickness will mean weariness and pain, the parting from our dearest will be agony, the sin of those we love will be cruel as the wound of sharpest sword-blade. And yet, spite all this, God has a special comfort, as well as a special lesson linked with each trial, and He will reveal them to us when our hearts are ready for lesson and consolation.

Ah! if we only listen for His teaching in our keenest griefs, as well as in lesser trials, we will find they are in very truth "blessings in disguise." For, while the Lord saith, "I will cause you to pass under the Rod," a mercy is joined to that passing by a tie close as one brief connecting "*and*" "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant."

This being so, dear H——, our object is to seek how we may enter into this covenant bond though treading the preparatory deserts that help to perfect the soul for a Higher life. Let us take our place then as children under the schoolmaster law first, and then faith, for "the law *is* our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we may be justified by faith." But, remember, "after that faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." What a blessed tender school it is by which we of this "new dispensation" are trained for the spiritual life. Since the coming of Christ and liberty, it stands out as something all unlike the bondage and rule of the old Mosaic law, as manhood is unlike infancy. Still, in a certain sense, these days are school days, but the order

is reversed—law is still teacher, but Christ is the Higher Master, and in His school “*Love is Law—Law is Love.*” The difference turns for explanation to the continuous spiritual growth that has been going on ever since the world began. The history of a newly settled country will serve to straightway make my meaning plain. “In the early days law needed to be rigidly enforced, until habits and local customs had been founded ; but when the claims of law had become firmly established, rule in many of its forms can safely be relaxed,” just as in our hearts there is a time when we are governed by law. “I will obey, because I must,” and the blessed aftertime when we act from the more noble principle of love and faith, which, while obedient to law, has passed beyond the need of its enforcement, though not beyond the need of the discipline of *love*.

And now let us strive to sum up a few of the lessons law and love teach.

You will remember in mentioning trials on the foregone page, poverty was the first I noted—and so we will first seek its lesson.

Canon Farrar writes : “Poverty, self-denial, the bearing of the yoke in youth, are

the highest forms of discipline, for a pure and godly manhood." And he adds, "Humble poverty is true wealth." This exalts the being poor, but what does it teach?

In reply, let us turn again to Farrar; he says: "You have but little of this world's goods—oh, be faithful with that little, and you will find it more than much." *Faithfulness*, then, is one lesson we are to learn, and Farrar also tells us—"A poverty which scorns luxury, which can dispense with superfluities, which can find life purest and strongest when it is disciplined under the beneficent laws of 'high thinking and plain living' is wealthier in every element of happiness than

" 'Forty seas, though all their shores were pearl,
Their waters crystal, and their rocks pure gold.' "

Another lesson obedience to law teaches is that, "whenever the labors of life are fulfilled in the spirit of striving against misrule, and doing whatever we have to do honorably and perfectly, however lowly the task they invariably bring happiness." For, ascending from the lowest to highest things, every scale of human industry worthily

followed gives peace.”—“Ask the laborer in the field, or at the forge, or in the mine ask the patient, delicate-fingered artisan, or the strong-armed, fiery-hearted worker in bronze or in marble, and none of them who are true workmen will ever tell you that they have found the law of heaven an unkind one—that ‘in the sweat of their brow they should eat bread until they return to the ground,’ nor that they ever found it an unrewarded obedience, if indeed it was rendered faithfully to the command, ‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.’” This is Ruskin’s tribute to the blessing that is in even the poverty which enforces manual labor, and surely it proves while certain conditions will always make enforced daily toil a desert, yet it can become a wilderness wherein the “wayfaring man shall find an highway, and parched ground become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water,” if the laborer treads its path in obedience to the principle of doing with his might, rendering faithful hand and heart service.

These illustrations have all been taught by law. When we think of all love holds,

in promise of blessing and true riches for those who walk the desert of this world's poverty; we find enumeration save for a few beatitudes quite beyond our limits.—“Blessed are the poor.” That is our Saviour's halo for poverty—*blessed!*—“Let the poor glory in the beatitude of poverty, it is a gift of God.” And for its peculiar trials, Christ's own tender solicitude provided. For, in anticipation of the sense of “aloneness,” that often makes the hardest part of the trial of small means, He made Himself the companion of those who had but little of this world's wealth, and who are among its toilers. “Is not this the Carpenter? We may indeed be thankful that the word remains, for it is full of meaning, and has exercised a very noble and blessed influence over the fortunes of millions. It has tended to ennoble and sanctify the estate of poverty, to ennoble the duty of labor.” And for the sake of doing this “Jesus Christ voluntarily chose the low estate of poverty, not indeed an absorbing, degrading, grinding poverty, which is always rare, and almost always remediable, but the commonest lot of honest poverty

which though it necessitates self-denial can provide with care for all the necessities of a simple life."

How love shines through all this—not the half-way love we mortals give, but love that manifests itself in the closeness of fellowship, sharing the yoke of poverty, bearing the burden of labor.

As for sickness—its law-taught lessons are so like an open page, I hardly need to sum them up, and yet we must not lose sight of these lessons, for when we have learned them, the desert of sickness, "that wilderness and solitary place shall be glad."

They are lessons that touch different notes of discipline; but the chief among them is, the learning submission in the acceptance of illness, in obedience to God's will. And then come like a troop of armed foes the special trials and temptations of illness. But, oh, the tenderness of this—love comes hand-in-hand with every trial and temptation, and we feel this love, when we cannot understand. For, "if we ponder on the incomprehensible nature of pain, mental and bodily, of its invisibleness, its vividness, its exceeding sharpness, and

penetrating omnipresence in our whole being, of its inevitable origin, and the indissoluble link which binds it to sin : and lastly, its mysterious relation to the passion and perfection of our Lord, we shall see reason to believe, that a power so near and awful has many energies, and fulfils many designs in God's kingdom secret from us."

As for the many different kinds of pain that come through illness, one remedy holds good, and that is, bear them as bravely as you can—not being too eager to seek relief, for that is wont to lead to restlessness.

Bear as silently as possible too, and patiently, for *that* is always possible—and strive to remember—for this will be your greatest help—you are called to endure this physical trial, "as unto the Lord." And the burden does not rest on you alone, for He Himself "bore our sicknesses." "He, the Son of God, became what we are—God is with us in our flesh. . . . He has that in His essential Godhead which need not be ashamed to call us brethren : as Love in a higher sense than we, He yet can embrace in His higher Sonship that lower sonship

which is ours. He is made our Brother, our Brother-Man. All that is brotherly in nature—far more, all that is brotherly in man : all that reaches out hands to greet and welcome us, all sympathy that grows up, all encouragement that flows, all help that springs to meet our needs : all tenderness, all gentleness, all kindness, all comfort, that soothes our misery : all pity, all compassion, all closeness of heart, all friendship, all love : all that comes to sweeten, to relieve, to support, to fortify : all courage to share, all unselfishness, all self-sacrifice, all this large brotherliness of man to man, is the work of the Son : all this is His prompting, His ministry, who for our sakes, since the children partake of flesh and blood, Himself partook of the same : He, the true Brother, Himself, in His own Person, came down and stood by our side, and shared all our ills, bore all our sicknesses, was bruised, was chastised : among us He came in our saddest need, and drank of our bitterest cup, and was baptized with our secret baptism that He might bring nigh to us all help, all comfort.”—Oh, ponder it, dear H——, “He came, laying His hand upon

our head in sickness, His fingers upon our eyes, sighing out His soul upon us, breathing His peace into us, touching us, taking us by the hand as we sink, entering into our homes, renewing us with the power of His love.”

Yes, “there is nothing He will not share, nothing He will not comfort.” He knows our pains, the measure and the number of them all, even to the bearing of weakness, which seems so slight a thing in comparison with acute suffering, and yet—how large a place it fills in sickness—what a desert weariness is!—It is a condition, too, as full of temptations as the branch of a thorn-bush is full of prickly thorns, and it brings its own tests and trials, their leaders, the impulse to selfishness, and self-indulgence. The only way to meet this phalanx of spiritual enemies that attack us through our weakness, is to fall back on the assurance that they come by God’s will; they are sent as tests of our true and whole-hearted submission, and patient endurance is the work they demand from us. And if it leads to a place hard to cross as the weary stretch of a sandy desert—our Forerunner, Christ,

knows all about it, and He will hear when we cry, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak." If you thus cry in profound earnest, even though the weary weakness does not leave your poor tired frame, you will nevertheless feel—"Though I am poor and needy, the Lord thinketh upon me."

And—the knowing, "He thinketh," it is a very restful pillow on which to fall back, and it changes the desert place "into the garden of the Lord."

And now, I will only briefly touch in passing, on the distressing forms of sickness which entail the loss of mental powers. If this trial comes to your beloved ones, all you can do is to seek shelter in the sure hope, though it may not be here on earth, yet God will in His own time fulfil His promise, and "the Holy Spirit will bring all things to remembrance." It is only for *now* that the light is dimmed—just for now, that the cloud is passing before the sun; *There* it will all come right, there will be no clouds—shadows will flee away.

In among the many lesser lessons illness teaches, I think perhaps one of the hardest

to learn is the cheerful acceptance of one's separation from the home circle. Only they who have felt this, can estimate what it means to hear the faint sounds of dear family life—while memory follows its routine, the peaceful assembling for morning prayers, the gathering around the home-table, the familiar exchange of thought, and planning for the day's duties and pleasures—and one's self shut out from it all, by no barrier of distance save a closed door or dividing wall or two. This is no very great desert, I know—but it makes a stern demand on submissive patience. It is hard, too, to become reconciled to the fact that by God's will one is set to learn a different lesson from the dear loved ones of home—because life to an invalid is unlike life to the strong and well—nevertheless, this trial is linked with love—and love reveals new comforts and blessings—for there are "desert roses"!

As for "longings"—words cannot span the desert places they stretch over in an invalid's days. The longing for a sight of the blue sky, when one spends day after day in a darkened room—for a sight of God's fields and high hills—shady woods—a glimpse of a

meadow and water-brooks—or even for a clump of wild-flowers growing by the roadside. There come hours, too, when longings crave for still wider out-looks—mountains and broad flowing rivers—great lakes—and the sea—the wide, free, beautiful sea!—Oh, how we long for them—only the “sick and weary” know. But, they are the only ones who know, too, “how many of our best things we learn in sickness.” I copy that sentence from one who penned a leaflet called the “Illuminated Valley”—and close following it, this servant of God wrote: “To me it is a new school of theology, or rather the higher and more illustrative department of the old. I did not know how strong the arms are which Christ puts around His sick and suffering disciples until I felt myself sinking into them for support; how tender the bosom of the Infinite Love, till there was nothing else for me to lean upon.”

Surely such an experience is worth the enduring of many longings; and there are many more than these few which I have enumerated, not the least among them a desire for independence that comes with the wish for a bit of free motion, even if it be

nought more than the crossing a room, the being able to stand before a friendly book-case choosing one's own volume.

Well—what profit comes of all these trials? Growth in grace God grant—grace to leave all longing—all restlessness—with Him: knowing He will satisfy them if it be best for us; knowing, too, and this is a flower of the obedience of faith, that had any other way been equally good for us, God would have trained by it. Hence, our part is not to question, but to obey—even if the command be only to “lie still.”

Before leaving this subject you ask me, dear H——, to give you one word revealing *love* in those subtle and trying sicknesses that rank under the name of “nervous diseases.”

I remember reading in a volume of comfort for invalids—a book written, I think, by the sister of Frederick Maurice—a passage that, I trust, will come to you like the touch of a soothing hand when next you are troubled by nervous suffering. “Do not struggle, for it increases nervous troubles fearfully—just lie still. He is love, and very pitiful, and of tender

mercy. Surely, then, He is grieved with and for you—is ‘touched with a feeling of your infirmities’—for ‘He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’ He bore nervous sufferings. How intensely He must have entered into them; every nerve of His was pierced, and wounded, and stretched. Say then, ‘O Saviour of the world, who by Thy cross and precious blood hast redeemed us, save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.’ ‘Fear not: He *will* strengthen you, and uphold you by ‘he right hand of His righteousness.’ ”

I would fain linger over still other desert places to which illness leads, but space forbids. I would fain, too, give you a word of cheer for the wearisome nights appointed, the sleepless hours when you say, “Would God it were morning,” and yet the morning taries. Yes—I would fain give you a word of cheer—and lo! I have done it, for remember that word “*appointed.*” God knows and God rules. What a light that knowledge sends gleaming across the darkness and the weariness—in its beams, spite the tossing and restlessness, you know the “Ever-

lasting Arms *are* underneath," for He has promised to "make all your bed in sickness."

But how when the day comes, and you meet the ever-recurring "What can I do? Must I lie useless hour after hour?"—

A great help in answering that question is to remember you are only commanded to do what God gives you strength for, and in the matter of "effort" there is always as much danger of sinning by overdoing as by underdoing! Then, too, you have a work, for there is always the learning of patience.

But we must leave illness and its teachings where "law and love" are so closely interblended. Enough if we have learned its great lesson is obedience, for then we will find help in our striving to attain it, from the knowledge that, "though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." And if we, too, are called to suffer, "it is the will of God," and if cheerfully borne, because His will, we will find when we "have passed through all that great and terrible wilderness," emblemed by suffering and sickness, then "we will come unto the mountain . . . which the Lord our God doth give us."

What a blessed sequel to our wilderness journey ! Think of the seeing, the longings satisfied, when we look up and off from the Mountain Height to which the discipline of our pilgrim days has led !

It will be worth all it costs—all—

“ To rest in trust : O German hymn,
Fill all my heart —my faith is dim !

“ To leave with Thee : in Thy dear hand
All things I cannot understand.
To rest in trust : O German hymn,
Fill all my soul—my faith is dim !

“ To ask Thee not the when or how,
With yielded heart to only bow ;
To find the joy that comes at length
From leaning sweetly on Thy strength.

“ To be Thy child : so, lying still,
To rest in trusting on Thy will ;
No other arm can fold away
So tenderly from night till day !

“ To take the peace He daily giveth
Unto each troubled heart that liveth ;
However weak to find my share
Of the dear Shepherd’s gentle care.

“ O rest of trust ! O trust in rest !
Sweet German hymn, thy faith is blest.

One thing remains for me to add to this long meditation ; and that is not an easy thing to explain. It is the lesson held in prosperity. The Old Testament record is a beacon-light pointing to this truth. "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness. He led him about, He instructed him. . . . He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields ; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." "But" (oh, heed this warning if you are called to meet the test of prosperity), after it all, "Jeshurun forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of His Salvation. . . . And when the Lord saw it He said, I will hide my face."

Sad as it is, this lack of gratitude—even amounting to the forsaking the Lord—is wont to be now, as it was then, the afterpart of great success in the things of this world. It makes one tremble at the very thought of great possessions, for our Lord Christ said : 'How hardly shall they which have riches enter the kingdom of Heaven.'—

You will remember, in numbering "deserts," the parting from our dear ones filled a foremost place, as it does in reality—but when called to that wilderness "consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." And the promise is—even by that way of the desert of loneliness, you will be brought—if you keep "the commandments of the Lord," to "a good land—a land of brooks of water, of fountains, and depths that spring out of valleys and hills." Yes, if we yield our will to God's will—and calmly, bravely, cheerfully, tread the path He appoints—all these "desert places" we have pondered will guide to the "land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees, and pomegranates: a land of oil olive and honey—a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it: a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.'

Dear—with such a prospect—such a hope—I repeat—is not the discipline life brings us worth all it costs?

Think, these verses are types—every one

rich with a spiritual as well as a material significance; for in the Bible, metaphor is the warp and woof of language. Hence the "*wheat*" stands as an emblem of vitality—grains of wheat, as we know, having been locked in mummy-cases for thousands of years, yet retaining the germ of life, which springs up when they are planted in the kindly earth. "*Olive oil*," you know how it is identified with "thoughts of peace, forgiveness, and charity"—the "*Vine*" with "wisdom and intelligence," and the deeper, dearer, more sacred meanings which the Gospel entwines about it. The "*Iron*" and "*Brass*," too, what well-known types they suggest of character. In truth there is not one of the terms used in these verses but it is full of significance—a sort of word-picture.—

But to return to the "desert of parting"—death here, leading to Life There—before we ponder it we will pass on, and find its comfort in meditating on "Open Windows."—Yes, we will go to the sepulchre, and God grant we may find the "stone rolled back from the door."

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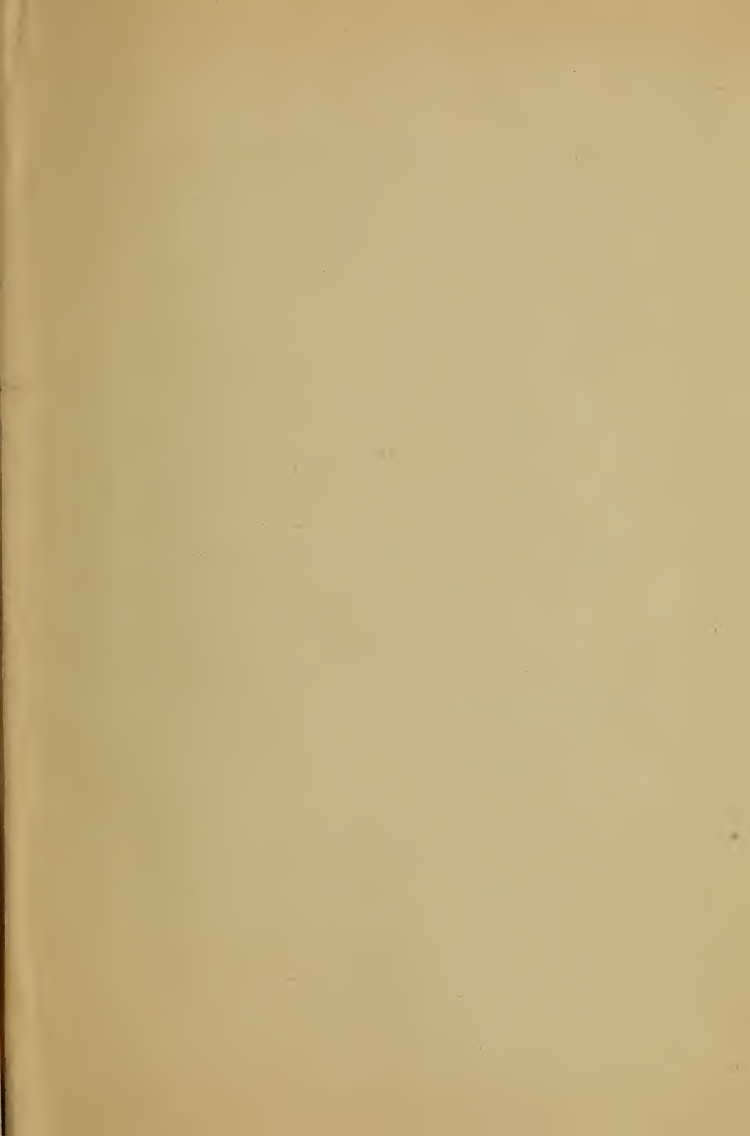
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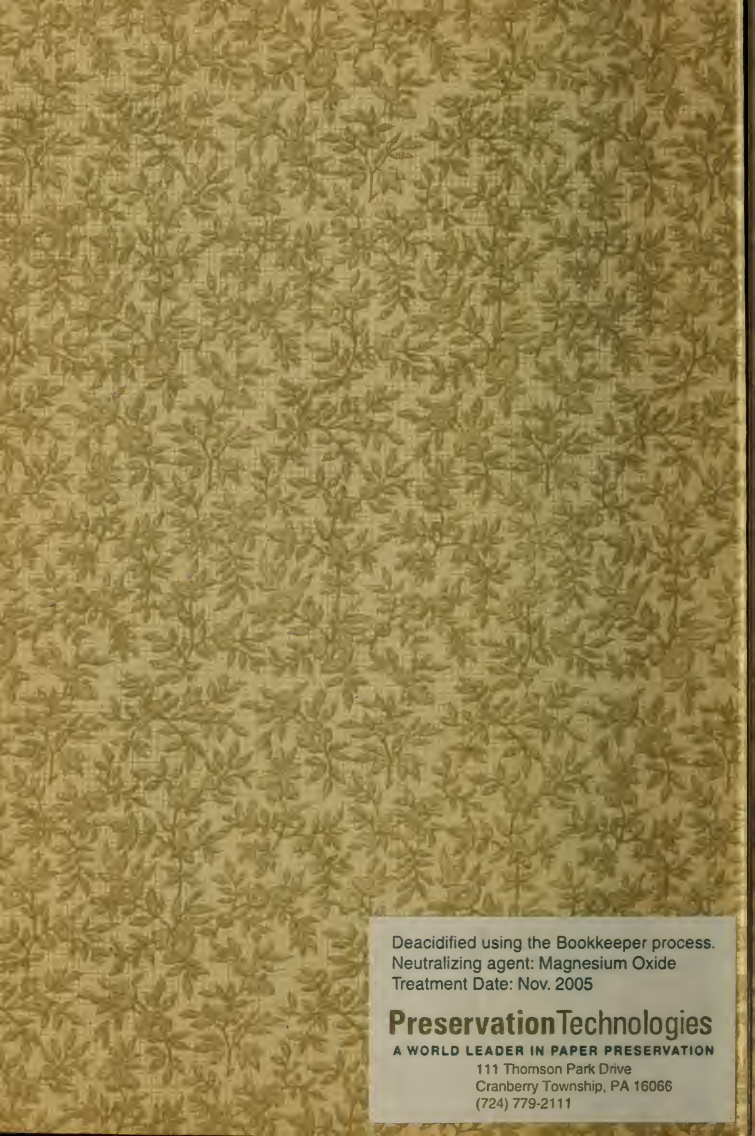
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