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## JOY IN SORROW,

OR

## COMFORT FOR THE BEREAVED.

MY AFFLICTED FRIEND—I come not to deny your grief: the cause of it is a sore and grievous wound. Nor can I pretend to comfort you by saying that your grief will do no good: its greatest aggravation is, that no tears will bring back the light of your eyes. Nor can I so far forget your woes, as merely to say that sorrow is the common lot of man. How can it but add to the grief of a benevolent mind, to know that others endure the same ills? Nor dare I declare your present feelings unreasonable. There is, too, a sacredness in your sorrow, which I would not rudely touch. I therefore come not impertinently to meddle with another's feelings, or harass you with vain words. Yet let me say a few things. They are for your good. They may prove inestimable blessings.

Your present affliction is *from God*, the good, the just, the wise, the holy. Your bereavement came not by chance, nor from the power of wicked men, or wicked angels. God has not consigned the world over to the uncontrollable sway of a blind fortuity, nor to the reign of devils. Look not much at the mere instruments of your affliction. To lament that *something else was not done*, when you did all that at the time seemed proper, is to lament that you have not as much knowledge as the prophets of God, or the God of prophets.

Beware of spending time in reflection on *second causes*. One important end of God in this affliction, is, to fix the thoughts *on him*. Defeat not this design of love. Though the Sabeans and Chaldeans took away Job's oxen and asses and camels, and murdered his servants, yet he said not a word of their wicked robbery, but declared, "The Lord hath taken away." Perhaps a message of deeper alarm never wrung a father's heart, than that which Samuel bore to Eli. With one thought the venerable man quieted himself: "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good."

There are *reasons for all your afflictions*. They are good and sufficient. They satisfy God. If known, you would see them to be such as should satisfy you.

In the absence of the principal of a grammar-school, his pupils formed two societies for mutual improvement. Their meetings were held in the only commodious vacant house in the village. A letter informed the teacher of what had been done. He immediately wrote, positively forbidding all further meetings. His order was strictly, though with pain, obeyed. It required all his good standing among his devoted young friends to restrain them from believing this act tyrannical. So painful was the state of their minds, that on his return, all preferred a respectful request for explanation of this mysterious conduct. Reminding them of his former and known kindness, he inquired if *that*, united with his declaration that he had good reasons, was not sufficient. They promptly expressed their confidence both in his kindness and veracity, but said it would relieve their minds to know his reasons. "Then," said he, "I have several. One is, that a few days before I left you, three men, having been secretly lodged in the house where your meetings were held, had died of the smallpox. Are you satisfied?" All assented.

So, child of sorrow, God is trying you. He spoils your plans, he crosses your wishes, he takes away your delights; but he has good reasons for all he does. Yet he frequently conceals the cause of all these trials. He says, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." It is both folly and wickedness to doubt his love or his wisdom in the mysteries of providence.

*Good may come out of this affliction*. You should be far more desirous of obtaining that good, than of getting rid of the evil under which you suffer. It is not necessary that your sorrow cease. It is necessary that it be sanctified. God has brought you into the house of mourning, that "by the sadness of the countenance, the heart may be made better." See to it, that you here gather some of the ripe clusters of "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Nothing but dreadful unbelief and wickedness can hinder this affliction from being one of God's choice and rich blessings.

Take heed that you *sin not*. The least sin, an unworthy thought of God, is a far greater evil than all your sorrows.

The kindest wish any can now have for you is, that in all your trials, you may not sin, nor charge God foolishly. Sin is the greatest of all evils. *Sin* is your worst enemy. Hell is not so terrible. *Sorrow* may be a friend: the cup in Benjamin's sack was the forerunner of Benjamin's portion. They who suffer with Christ shall also reign with him.

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,  
Leads to the land where sorrows are unknown.”

God has had on earth one Son without sin, but *never one without affliction*. The road to heaven is soaked with the blood of fifty millions of martyrs. Rivers of water ran down their eyes. Yet they all, even when on earth, regarded sin as the worst evil in the universe. O, avoid the very appearance of evil. God has a right to expect that you will now honor him. Do it, and he will honor you. But if you now sin against him, you shall be lightly esteemed.

Suffer not to pass unheeded the *mercies* which attend this affliction. Does your heart faint under the *suddenness* of the stroke? Perhaps nothing but a revelation from God, attested by miracles, or severe and protracted sufferings in the deceased, could have fully prepared your mind for it. The former you could not expect. The latter you could not wish. Besides, God has told you to be always ready for any death: “All flesh is grass.” He lent you your beloved only to *remain with you at his will*. Let the thought of murmuring be rebuked by the following beautiful story from the Mishna of the Rabbins.

During the absence of the Rabbi Meir, his two sons died—both of them of uncommon beauty, and enlightened in the divine law. His wife bore them to her chamber, and laid them upon her bed. When Rabbi Meir returned, his first inquiry was for his sons. His wife reached to him a goblet; he praised the Lord at the going out of the Sabbath, drank, and again asked, “Where are my sons?” “They are not far off,” she said, placing food before him that he might eat. He was in a genial mood, and when he had said grace after meat, she thus addressed him: “Rabbi, with thy permission, I would fain propose to thee one question.” “Ask it then, my love,” replied he. “A few days ago a person intrusted some jewels to my custody, and now he demands them: should I give them back to

him?" "This is a question," said the Rabbi, "which my wife should not have thought it necessary to ask. What, wouldest thou hesitate or be reluctant to restore to every one his own?" "No," she replied, "but yet I thought it best not to restore them, without acquainting thee therewith." She then led him to the chamber, and stepping to the bed, took the white covering from the dead bodies. "Ah, my sons, my sons," loudly lamented their father; "my sons! the light of my eyes, and the light of my understanding: I was your father, but you were my teachers in the law." The mother turned away and wept bitterly. At length she took her husband by the hand and said, "Rabbi, didst thou not teach me that we must not be reluctant to restore that which was intrusted to our keeping? See, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.'" "Blessed be the name of the Lord," echoed the Rabbi, "and blessed be his holy name for ever."

Besides, had you known all you now know, perhaps you could not have done your duty to the dear deceased. Therefore, think of the mercies attending this whole affliction, count them up. It is a mark of an ignoble mind to pervert any conduct, especially that of our best friend.

Lastly: your present situation is not without *its appropriate duties*. Is any afflicted, let him pray? Cast your care upon God, for he careth for you. Earnestly inquire why God has afflicted you. Be patient. Be quiet. Be gentle. Be tender-hearted. Weep with those who weep. Do your duty to those who still live. Labor for the salvation of souls. Especially, rely on Jesus Christ and his rich grace; and even *you* shall soon say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Blessed be the name of the Lord. My choicest blessings flow from my severest trials."

"Therefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Flee to the promises. Make God your refuge; and when you "pass through the waters, he shall be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; for Jehovah is your God, and your Saviour. Fear not. He will be with you."