



THE
SICK-BEDS
OF THE
SAINTS

THE FLOWER
BEDS OF GOD

PHILIP BENNETT POWER

The Sick-Beds of the Saints

The Flower Beds of God

Philip Bennett Power

Half-Title Page

My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies. Song of Solomon 6:2-3

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. Song of Solomon 4:16

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Introduction

This little book is a companion to the ‘Sick-man’s Comfort Book.’ They have a common origin, each having been suggested to me while praying by the sick-bed of an afflicted servant of God, whom I visit from time to time; and who has now lain for thirteen years on a bed of suffering.

From her sick-bed some of these flowers have been gathered; and although she is now reduced so low as not to be able even to articulate at all, still from the look in her eye, and the motions of her lips, which a friend can interpret, the flowers can be seen to be still blooming.

A book so small as this must of necessity be imperfect. It can treat but slightly of any point, and many it must leave untouched altogether. For example, in these pages there is no separate mention of Patience and Usefulness, and many other graces belonging to the sick estate.

But imperfect as it is, if the Holy Spirit’s influence accompany its perusal, it may help to make many a sick-bed a place of God-glorifying in the world. It may help to make the sickbed wear a new and brighter and more hopeful aspect in the sight of the sufferer.

When Madame Guyon was imprisoned in the Castle of Vincennes, in 1695, she not only sang but wrote songs of praise to her God. 'It sometimes seemed to me,' she said, 'as if I were a little bird whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing now to do but sing. The joy of my heart gave a brightness to the objects around me. The stones of my prison looked in my eyes like rubies. I esteemed them more than all the gaudy brilliancies of a vain world. My heart was full of that joy which Thou givest to them that love Thee in the midst of their greatest crosses'—a sentiment which she embodied, during one of her imprisonments, in a touching little poem, which begins thus:—

*'A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air;
And in my songs I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.'*

Thus may it be with the readers of the following pages. They may see their sick-beds to be places of wealth, and beauty, and green spots for God in a world which, so far as glorifying Him is concerned, is only too desert-like and bare.

Only, as I have more than once reminded the reader, let it be distinctly understood that these pages are not for the actual sick-bed people only. They form a small part of the sick folk of the world. Nor are they in all cases to be numbered amongst its severest sufferers.

I have written for the arm-chair people, and the sofa people, and the people who are weak and ailing, and who find life a weariness and drag,

and who in one form and another must walk slowly, or it may be sit down altogether on its shady side.

The suffering ones of God are spread over a much larger area than that covered by sick-beds.

May these lines help all who are thus dealt with by God, to bring forth fruit to His glory. May they inspirit them, and make them feel that they are something worth, and that their life is not a wasted one, but one which God has appointed, not only for their good, but also for His own praise.

Chapter One

Sick Beds

There lies before me on my table a piece of stone, in which it is just possible, by looking closely, to discern a yellow speck. That speck is gold. On examining it more carefully through a magnifying glass, I have discovered in all four specks. But they are almost infinitesimal in proportion to the stone itself.

But I know whence this ore came, for I have been down in its dark mine myself. It is quartz, quarried from a hard rock; and I have seen tons upon tons of it, in which there was not a trace of metal to be found; nevertheless, when crushed, and washed, and treated with mercury, I have seen a large gold cake come from this self-same unpromising mass. Moreover, I am possessed of sundry ornaments of wrought gold, which came from such unpromising lumps of rock, the possibilities of their existence being hidden in that apparently valueless stone.

As with that piece of stone, so with the sickbed; it is unpromising in itself, it is unattractive; but, hidden in it is treasure, and to extract in some measure that treasure is the purpose of these pages. Or, to take our

similitude from the title which stands above; there are pieces of ground which look rough and stony in themselves; at first sight one would say that nothing would grow in them; but here, for all that, may flourish rose, and violet, and all that can rejoice the eye, and perfume the air round. And such a piece of ground is every sick bed. And capable of such blossoming and perfuming, and of being a thing of beauty and usefulness in the world, is the sick-bed of every saint.

By the term; 'sick-bed,' it must not be supposed that we mean only that extreme condition of illness in which people are obliged, as we say, 'to keep their bed.'

I wish these pages to embrace the cases of a far larger number than these. By the sick-bed, I mean the condition of illness—I mean the sofa-people, and the arm-chair-people, and the people who are weak all day and ever weary; and the people for whom life has no spring, no crisp breeze, no sunshine—the people who creep slowly along on the shady side of life's path—the people who ail, and do not know what is the matter with them—all these may claim these pages as their own; but of course, pre-eminently they belong to those who are on the sick-bed itself.

If we want to see the sick-bed in its beautiful aspect as a flower-bed of God, we must begin by refusing entirely to take the world's view of it. The world has its views on all things, and of course on this amongst the number. And its view is a very depressed one. It looks on the condition of illness as one of unmitigated evil. The sick man is shut out from all its delights, and from many of its occupations, and means of profits, and objects of interesting pursuit. All it can say of him is '*Poor fellow, you are to be pitied.*' It has few, if any mitigations to offer. The world has no room in its busy thoroughfares, or in its active pleasure-haunts, for sick people.

Besides, it looks upon them as depressing objects. They are in the way; and never so much as when suggesting thoughts which are not of this world.

No doubt, there are philosophers in the world; and something, perhaps, can be got out of them. But all they can do is to tell us to be resigned, that *'what can't be cured must be endured'*; perhaps, that *'no one is so badly off but that he might be worse.'* For all this, we thank the philosophers very much, but are sorry to say that it does not do us much good.

It is when the religious sunlight falls upon the sick-bed that it makes it beautiful and fruitful too; and we believe that we can offer the sick man something better than the world can.

Our object, however, is not now to comfort; that we have tried to do in our *'Sick man's comfort-book.'* What we have now in hand is the dignifying and ennobling of the sick-bed, so that those who are the sick folk of the world may feel that their condition has its place and honour in the mind of God, and that they occupy a very important position in His kingdom.

In the first place, then, let our sick ones remember that they occupy an important place in the mind of God.

They do so from their numbers. If God takes note of a sparrow that falls to the ground; if He noted the numbers even of children in Nineveh; if Jesus took compassion on the many who came to Him to be taught, and became in want of food; if the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal were all numbered; if the Lord describes Himself as having *'many people'* in a certain city—then we may be sure that, where even two or three are gathered together, there is He in the midst of them; and numbers of sick folk have an important place in His mind.

And, truly, they are many. They are millions. There would be a very sensible diminution of the population, if all the sick ones were taken away. God never could have intended so large a field in His great estate to lie barren and uncultivated, and produce neither fruit nor flower for Him.

Their distinctiveness, too, marks them as occupying an important place. Their position is well defined. They are as much walled in as a garden is; they are a distinct part of the great King's estate. Something particular is expected from them, just as it is from those in health.

Then, let it be remembered that they must occupy an important place, from the fact of their being the subject of God's plan and mind; and from their being a particular sphere in which He acts. It is said.

***'God has His plan
For every man.'***

And there must be a plan for all those multitudes of sick. Sickness has its place in the thought of God as much as health; and He means to act in it. He is as much in the life of the man on a pillow, as of the one on a throne. To us the sphere of action may seem much greater in one case than in the other, but it is the same Almighty and Energetic God who works in both.

And sick-beds have been important places; and illness, an important state.

There has been successful teaching on sickbeds, where there has been failure in the activities of life. In all probability, the highest lessons of human wisdom which men have learned have been when laid aside. Then men have perceived the nothingness of the world; then they have learned

most about themselves, and about God; then their minds have been soft and tender, and they became willing to be taught in the school of God. Men have there been shut up with God, and have been able to hear the still small voice.

And great victories have been won on sickbeds. There have often been many strugglings before men were able to be still, and to know that the Lord He was God—before the spirits could become calm in faith. Some of the fiercest warfare of the soul has been carried on there; for the sick-bed is a place of realities, and the war that is waged there is at close quarters. The sick-bed, then, is not to be put on one side as a place where nothing is to be gained, nothing done.

No doubt, there are many hindrances to our having a good opinion of sick-beds.

The unpleasantness of illness itself—no one likes to be ill—the general bad opinion about it --the little that is known of the good in it—it's being out of the usual beat of man's thought— all these prevent people knowing what a sickbed, or a condition of illness, may be. The one main thought connected with illness in the minds of most men is how to get out of it—that it is an evil to be escaped; and so long as this is the case, they will never see it in the light of having great possibilities of good. Men will think about the activities of life, and estimate them, and consider them to be of importance; but the calm stillness of the sick chamber or the sick state, they do not think about.

Surely this lowly state has much to contend with, before it can be cultivated as a flower-bed in the garden of the Lord. Men must believe that it can bear something better than nettles and thistles, before they look hopefully upon it, and try to produce something beautiful in it;

Chapter Two

What People are to think of their Sick-Beds

Many men in the world make their fortunes, and many, on the other hand, go to ruin, simply from the fact of their being able, or not being able, as the case may be, to make a right estimate of the position in which they are placed. Some have seen that their position was a good one, and they made the most of it; others did not see that they had any position at all, and so of course left it unimproved—made nothing of it.

Now, this remark applies to the sick-bed, or the condition of illness. So long as a man will not account it a position at all, but only a disturbance of, or intrusion upon his natural condition of health, and energy, and spirits; so long will illness be to him but a source of fretting and discontent—a plot of life's ground covered with weeds, and not a garden-bed blossoming for God.

Therefore, we say at the outset to every sick or ailing one into whose hands these pages come, estimate the condition. Don't consider this illness as merely a chance intruder; it may be for a long time, or perhaps, only for a short; but make an estimate of it, and count it a definite state.

It is so in God's eyes. Now you are in a fixed and definite condition—although different from that in which you were at one time—in which most people are; and you certainly are not thus without God's knowing it. How can you be, when it is He who put you into it? Get rid of all ideas of chance, of all the irritations which the thoughts of an untoward chance are sure to engender; and see God in your illness; and see Him not through an eye jaundiced by that illness, but as He is, a God, full of wise, true love. To have a single hard thought of God, will be to spoil all. Say, *'I am here, I am thus, for a purpose; and that purpose is the thought of love.'*

Perhaps you can trace your illness to some sinful folly of your own; and then you say, *'I never can expect any blessing on, or from, a Sick-bed, which is my own fault.'* But this is not so. Let it be granted that your Sick-bed is one of chastening, still people are chastened for their profit; God is as truly a God of love when chastening, as when doing anything else. You may say to yourself, *'I am now in a well-defined state in God's eyes. I am amongst the sick, and He is looking for what belongs to that state.'*

This is a very definite state in the eyes of another also—i.e., in those of Satan. He sees exactly where, and how you are. As he has those who are well at a particular disadvantage, so he has those who are ill. He knows all the weakness and the lassitude of the sick estate, and he knows all the God-visittings of that estate; and it is as a sick man, with all a sick man's especial advantages and disadvantages, that he will deal with you.

There is one other, in whose eyes it is very important that this condition should be plainly recognised; and that is yourself. If you are in the sick estate, do not want to make out that you are well. Take up your position before God as He sees it. See that you have this particular piece of ground to cultivate for Him. Do not want other pieces for which you have not the

ability or strength, or to which you are not called —know where you are to work for Him, where to rear His flowers, where to earn your reward.

Next: see the possibilities of your position. Do not for a moment think that God has picked out a dry, and barren, and unpromising spot on His estate or in His garden, and told you to cultivate that.

Where there is no possibility recognised, there must always be hopelessness; and where there is hopelessness, there must be the destruction of all energy and effort. But we shall have more to say of this farther on.

Let us have firm determinations with regard to this estate of sickness. Let us say, *'By God's grace, I am determined that it shall be an estate of glorifying to God, and of profit to me. I will not allow myself to dwindle down into the poor helpless invalid, no good to the honour of his God, or to himself, or to anyone else. I am not blotted out of existence because I am a sick man or woman; only my old sphere is changed. I will grow something in that piece of stony ground which it has pleased God to appoint me to cultivate. I will not allow illness to pick away my energies, and insensibly reduce me to being nobody.'*

We require a great deal of energy and determination to keep ourselves up when long illness comes; but here, as elsewhere, a brave spirit will do a great deal. When the hot winds blow in Australia, the air is like that of a furnace, and its tendency is utterly to prostrate the human frame. If a person gives up to it, and throws himself upon the sofa, the lassitude and weariness are twice as bad--the only plan is to keep about, to determine to be occupied; and then the effects of this trying wind are not felt nearly so much. Indeed, all sick people get rid of a great deal of the weariness and hopelessness of their state, if they determine to do something. And it is astonishing what they can do if they try.

So is it with the sick one here. Let us say, *'My estate of sickness shall not be a barren one'* —my opinion of it is that it need not be so; and thus the very opening before us will help our determination to do, and be something in it

Again: suppose we connect our sick-bed with the future; suppose we enlarge our horizon, and see how our characters are being formed in sickness for the enjoyment of the land of everlasting health; suppose we see that there are great rewards connected with our worthy occupation of this apparently low estate; suppose we believe that every day of trial here is connected with many days of joy and health, and that every weariness, every pain is fruitful; then the present becomes instinct with life and hope, and the sick-bed or sick estate is cheery with the prospects which legitimately belong to it when it is sanctified.

Again: you must think of your sick-bed as something that God has expectations from. He sees it in a particular aspect, and that, a very important one. He seldom reduces anyone to being a nonentity. Your estate of illness is as much a talent committed to you for His glory, as much a bit of the vineyard to be planted and gathered for Him, as those apparently larger trusts given to other people, which you so much envy. It is Infinite Wisdom that appoints us our estate of illness; and this Wisdom is no longer infinite, if it could have done better, and appointed us an estate more for the glory of God, and for our real good.

God cannot put you into a state of independence of Himself by looking for nothing from you. And if you believe this you will set yourself to think, *'What does the Lord now expect from me? He knows the exact flowers which this estate is able to produce; what are they, O Lord, that I may cultivate them for Thee?'* If we have a spark of nobility in us, we must

rejoice that such an one as God looks for something from us; that we are not reprobate ground capable only of bringing forth briars and thorns, and nigh unto cursing. The fact of His expecting produce, and His accepting it, will make us desirous to produce it

And this will wonderfully quicken us. When we know that the Lord will visit His garden, that He will delight in the flowers of it, that in it no rose is born to blush unseen, we shall have spirit to cultivate for Him. I have seen beautiful gardens, which the owner scarcely ever visited —some there are which the owners positively dislike—the gardener’s work is thrown away, so far as his master’s appreciation is concerned his only comfort must lie in the consciousness of having done his duty. But this is but cold comfort compared with that which would come from a generous word of recognition, or from the knowledge that the flowers had given the master pleasure.

The Owner of our flower-beds, dear sick brethren and sisters, will come, determined to be pleased, if He find what is pleasurable; determined to admire, if He find what is admirable. He comes to our lowly estate, expecting to find in it what its soil is capable of growing.

Believe then that you have given to you not a piece of rock, but of soil—soil rich and deep, soil which you may cultivate, and upon which Heaven will rain and shine. Believe in the capacities of illness to produce something — flowers or weeds; to produce much—very beautiful flowers, or very rank and poisonous weeds.

Of the sick ones it might be said, *‘A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed,’* but of them also, *‘Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranate with pleasant fruits, camphire with spikenard—spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees*

of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes, with all the chief spices; a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.'

Thus let us be for our Lord. Thus, conscious of having a garden tilled for Him, we, too, shall say with humble confidence, *'Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.'* (Cant. iv. 12.)

Chapter Three

The Flower of Humility

*Patience and Humility!
Where these two companions be,
On their lover they bestow
Quiet calm through weal and woe.
So until my journey ends,
These I choose for daily friends
For Humility is blest,
And sweet Patience giveth rest
Anton Ulrich.*

*Humility—that low sweet root
From which all heavenly virtues shoot
Moore.*

Humility is the violet of God. It is His beautiful fragrant-hidden flower, which, nestled away, is unobtrusive to the eye, but sheds its perfume all around. No one need see this violet, to know that it is close at hand. How could the garden of the Lord be complete without it? how can

the Church be without those who are of such a spirit that they will wipe the very feet of Jesus with the hair of their head; and who by Love's great law of give and take must receive, as well as give, and carry away of the perfume, they expend?

What this little flower is, and how it grows, and what it does, will all be useful subjects of thought for those who are in the estate of illness, be it chronic, or short and sharp. He who wills that his Sick-bed should be a flower-bed of God may be quite certain that the Master, when He comes, will want this flower, and will care nothing for all others if this be not there. He looks for it, indeed, in all parts of His great property, but especially here.

Let it be found in us, dear Lord, by the sweet working of Thy Holy Spirit—a flower planted, a flower cultivated; not wild nature's semblance, poor in colour, poorer still in scent; but Grace's plant, its colour deep, its perfume rich—a garden-flower of God.

And, now, what is this precious flower? It is true lowliness in all its forms; lowliness in our estimate of ourselves as sinners; belief in our own entire unworthiness of anything but ruin; a feeling of entire smallness in the presence of God; yes, more than that, of vileness in ourselves; that we are just nothing worth, but what God of His mercy may be pleased to esteem us. Humility puts God very high, and us very low; and it leaves us very low. We want to get no higher, we deliberately wish to remain low. If anyone could give us a better opinion or a better thought of ourselves, we would not accept it. The element of choice enters into true Humility; we wish to be as we are.

The world, no doubt, considers all this very mean, and small, and low; but we cannot help that; this is the very nature of this very particular plant; and if we are to grow it in the garden of the Lord, we cannot grow it any

other way. If we could grow it on a high stem, and without its hiding leaves, it would soon die in a garish light, and beneath a fierce heat. We must take things as they are; he who wants a violet must seek it on a lowly stem, and amid shading and obscuring leaves; he who wants humility must seek it in a heart which will take up a very lowly position,—even the very lowliest of all.

Lowly, however, as this flower is, it is very precious in the eyes of the One, whose flowerbeds our sick-beds are. And if He think much of it, it need not trouble us if the world think little. We grow our flowers, beloved, not for the world, but for Him. The world will not trouble to come much to the sick-beds of God's people,—or to any sick-beds; but there is One who visits them often; who comes to see how things are going on there; who comes to gather and accept what He finds there that is good; and if He make much of this particular plant, then let us do the same, and cultivate it for Him.

Holy Scripture shows us it is a precious plant. The Lord *'will save the humble person'* (Job xxii. 29). *'He forgetteth not the cry of the humble'* (Psalm ix. 12). *'Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud'* (Prov. xvi. 19). Then we are told that, *'Honour shall uphold the humble.'* But the most precious text of all is that in Isaiah lvii. 15, *'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'* Observe how God here displays His exceeding majesty, and tells us that all this shall dwell with the humble and contrite one. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace

to the humble. *It is the one 'that humbleth himself that shall be exalted'* (Luke xviii, 4).

God could not plant a garden without this flower. Even men gather violets in bunches all by themselves; and this Humility, with all its blossomings, is as precious to God.

This flower was grown beautifully and luxuriantly by Jesus. It is true we have no record of His ever having been ill; and no voice comes to us from any sick-bed of His. But His flesh, even at the best, was for Him a weak and low estate; and many a time He was sick at heart; and what sick-bed have we that we can compare to the Cross? and what pain to His agony and bloody sweat?

The life of Jesus is the most beautiful flowerbed God ever had on earth; and the violet blooms here, and there, and everywhere, in all His words and ways. He not only humbled Himself unto death, even the death upon the Cross, but He spent a preliminary life of humility —Himself God's beautiful flower amid the weeds around—stooping everywhere, and to every one —to publicans and sinners, to the sick and the young, to those with whom others would have nothing to do.

This beautiful plant, Humility, was in Jesus by nature. But now, how does it grow with us? It grows from seed; but it must grow by cultivation. It is an implanting of the Spirit. It is the Holy Ghost that makes us humble; and when He puts us on the track of humility, He expects us to walk in it. Of ourselves we have high thoughts; low thoughts are His gift.

And the sick-bed is just one of the chief places which the Holy Spirit has for implanting low thoughts of oneself. There we are brought low in body; there we have time to think; there many things with which we are connected, which seemed great, become small; and we who were great with

them become small with them; our-self and our work dwarf down in the presence of eternity, in our coming near to God, in the calmness and the depth of thought. The Spirit of God is dealing with us to make us feel humble, and small, and low.

Now, it will be very useful to us to remember, that we must not of necessity put a disagreeable meaning on the words ‘humbling,’ and ‘being humbled.’ Being humbled does not imply that we are being punished. It often means that God sees us destitute of a beautiful grace which He would have us possess, and which He is giving to us. God might say, ‘*I will make this dear child of mine humble, more humble than he is,*’ without His dealing with him in any anger at all. Therefore we need not kick against the pricks. God may be only putting fresh ornament on one He loves.

But now, how shall we grow this plant, so far as we are concerned? The grand way will be by the contemplation of Jesus. In some way or other, everything connected with grace in the Divine life is sure to come back to Jesus. So if you want to be humble, come near to Him, and look at Him in His sorrows, and example, and all belonging to him—how He made Himself of no reputation—how He became a worm and no man—how with the twelve legions of angels at His command, He gave His back to the smiter and His cheek to them that plucked off the hair—how He was content to be despised and rejected of men—to be worse off than the foxes with their holes, and the birds of the air with their nests, while He was living; and to be indebted to charity for His grave when He died.

Illness, whether we be confined to bed or not, gives us great opportunities for thinking, and coming near Jesus, and hearing whispering voices from the Holy Spirit. And when God talks to us, and we listen, we may be sure we shall hear something on this subject of humility. Then we

see how foolish we were when we were well—how we made too much of ourselves, and our work—how we were wrong in thinking ourselves to be ‘somebody,’ at all. We now refrain ourselves, and keep ourselves low, and are content to have our soul like that of a weaned child; we do not want to be anything or anyone anymore; we are content to be small.

And now, see how we ourselves get great enjoyment from the growth of this plant in the flower-bed of the Lord. Humility is one of the most helpful little plants in the world, possessing virtues in its presence, and perfume, and the ramification of its roots in our hearts, which are great wealth to ourselves.

What can be more disquieting than discontent. It frets us terribly upon a sick bed. We shall not say much about it here, for we shall have to say more about it by-and-by; we shall only say that Humility is a great help to its opposite—Contentment. We do not, when humble, say querulously ‘*we ought to have this or that;*’ but well knowing how much more we have than we deserve, we are satisfied and thankful too.

It is not in human nature to be satisfied, or quiet, much less thankful, if one thinks that he is not treated well—that he has not as much as he deserves—that he is slighted; but Humility will put human nature right, and we shall be thankful, and at rest.

It is a great attainment to be quiet, to have ourselves in hand, to be still. Nothing much of what is good can come our way while we are restless. All our strength is spent in beating against the bars of our cage. We are not in a receptive state; and, even if ever so much blessing were coming our way, it would be no good to us. The humble man is quiet. Quietude is the natural condition of the humble.

Let Humility work out this result for you. Then your sick-bed will have every possibility of being a flower-bed for God. The earth will not be knocked about hither and thither by the disturbings of unrest: this plant and others too can grow.

So with 'Praise' also, of which we shall have more to say presently. Humility is very fond of Praise. It is a great promoter of it. It often brings out the instruments of music, and says, '*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy name.*' The fact is Humility is a little plant with very spreading fibres. It clusters around the base of flowers which grow on much taller stems; and they are beholden to it, for it keeps the ground moist about their roots.

The humble man has many things which others have not, or, at any rate, we may say, '*many things are to him what to others they are not.*' As to the hungry man every bitter thing is sweet; so, to the humble man, everything felt to be undeserved is beautiful.

Come then, dear friends, who have sick-beds, or the sick-estates, as your condition in life, cultivate this precious little flower. It is God's flower; it is Jesus Christ's flower; it is the Church's modest, but beautiful adornment.

It is a flower that flourishes nowhere better than in heaven. The angels veil their faces, they are humble.

There is no lowness in lowliness, no meanness in Humility; wherever true greatness is, there true Humility is also. '*I am meek and lowly of heart,*' said Jesus; God will have done great things for us if He enables us to say the same. And thus lying on our beds, or in our chambers, or going about in quiet walks of life, which alone suit us now, we shall be unruffled, unvexed. We shall see others make money which we might have made, or fill positions which we might have filled, or enter into relationship which

might have been ours, and we shall not rebel. We shall have no hard thoughts to think, or words to say of God. We know enough of ourselves to know that we have not been dealt with after our sins, nor rewarded according to our iniquities. We shall not be expecting anything, grasping after anything, pining for anything; God has been better to us than we think we deserved; and thus this little grace, which honours Him, blesses us.

Chapter Four

The Flower of Gratitude

‘Thankful for all God takes away, Humbled by all He gives.’
— Keble.

‘O Lord that lends me life, lend me a heart replete with
thankfulness.’—Shakespeare.

As in the natural garden some flowers are rarer than others, so is it in the spiritual one. There are some plants which are very rare in the garden of the Lord. Amongst these must be numbered ‘Gratitude.’ The really consciously grateful people are but few. Indeed, even in the world, Gratitude is so rare that it has been defined to be more hope for future favours than thankfulness for those already received. *‘Were there not ten cleansed,’* said our Lord, *‘but where are the nine?’* (Luke xvii. 17.)

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that, not one-tenth part even of the people of God ever show any suitable gratitude for the mercies they receive.

Now this flower of Gratitude is comparatively rare on the sick-bed. This is only what we might expect, when we consider how it is with those who are well, and whose blessings can be easily seen.

We do not see at once what we have to be grateful for on a sick-bed. Perhaps we have pain; and, no doubt, looking at the matter from a merely human point of view, it seems hard to be grateful under such circumstances. Perhaps we have privations. We want many things which others have; our condition in many respects appears to contrast unfavourably with that of others round us; we feel far more inclined to envy and complain than to be grateful.

Would we not willingly exchange all our sick-comforts, even suppose them to be many, for the commonest things which those in health possess?

Who would not exchange his soft arm-chair for the vigorous use of his legs; or his pillow of down for a spade he could wield; or his beef-tea and mutton-chop, '*done to a turn,*' for the roughest fare that he could digest and enjoy? Who is there that would not choose plenty of work and the power to do it, whistling as he goes along, instead of enforced ease and quiet, and the inability to bear any bustle or sound? What we would have, that we have not; and what we have, that we do not care for; so heavy is the counterbalance of illness; and so it comes to pass that we are often if not absolutely ungrateful, yet at least not grateful to any extent; and this beautiful flower of Gratitude is not found on our sick-beds.

Now, we must try and improve on this state of things. When the seedsman sends me annually his list of seeds, I find with them some hints as to the habits of the plants, and how to grow them; and this little book would

not only say a word as to the divine plants themselves, but also as to how they are to be reared.

Let us look at these three points: (1) Who we are to be grateful to; (2) What we are to be grateful for; and (3) How we are to become grateful.

We are to be grateful to God and man. We have many kindnesses from both.

If we considered for a moment what we might have justly received at the hands of God, if He had dealt with us according to our sins, and rewarded us according to our iniquities, we should be more grateful for receiving anything good from Him at all. We sing in the doxology, *'Praise God from whom all blessings flow,'* and sometimes, perhaps, we have sung that hymn,

*'When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My wondering soul surveys,
Transported at the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.'*

But we have come lamentably short of this in our real feelings.

Yes! though God can remove all our sufferings at a word, if He will; and though He sees fit, instead, to leave us to suffer many things, it is He whom we have to thank for every good thing we have. And if we have no gratitude to Him, no kind thoughts of Him, what an aspect must our sick-bed wear in His eyes; when He looks at us lying there with many an alleviation and blessing, and out of hell, where we might have been, and says, *'All this has this sick one, and, yet, never a thought of gratitude to Me?'* Then there is man—our fellow-man—into whose heart God has put it to be kind to us; how many amongst them we have to be grateful to. Sometimes there is the constant wife and husband, who remembers so well the two sides of the marriage vow—*'in sickness and in health.'* Little, perhaps, did the dear one

think, on that bright wedding morn, how much was involved in that word 'sickness,' in that word 'cherish:' how many flickering lights of hope would have to be shaded from going out: how many smouldering embers of life blown up into a flame again: how many hushed voices and soft falling footsteps there must be; but the one upon whom the call has come (be it husband or wife) has been equal to it; and, even, in Heaven's own eyes, the phrase 'to cherish in sickness' has received a good illustration.

And sometimes there is the faithful friend, upon whom we have no claim, and who has been sent by God; and sometimes the loving child; and sometimes the patient nurse, and the servant who does far more than any wages demand; and there is even the visitor who drops in for a few minutes—we owe gratitude to them all.

And let us be content to owe it. Let us not want that people should feel under obligation to us, and yet that we should never feel under any to them. The great chain of love is composed of links which catch, and are caught. To be fully happy, we must feel that we owe and are owed—the flower of Gratitude flourishes best near, that of Humility; for we must be humble to be willing to owe. It is the proud man that will not be under an obligation to any one; and so violates that mutual dependence which is the law of the kingdom of love, i.e., the kingdom of Christ.

Let us look then in our illness at every one with a grateful eye. Let us determine to be grateful to them, and with gratitude will come love.

But we shall be able to do this better, if we think for a few moments what we have to be grateful for.

Let us first look at this in connection with God.

First, then. Let us be thankful that we are no worse. Perhaps at first sight one says, *'that is poor comfort, my feeling is that I am sorry I am so bad.'*

Well, as the old proverb says, *'nothing is so bad but that it might have been worse.'* If I cannot move one leg, I might not have been able to move either; or if I cannot move either leg, I might not have been able to move either leg or arm; or even if legs and arms be both crippled, I might in addition have been blind, or blind and deaf. Those who wish to be grateful, shall never be left in want of the knowledge of something to be grateful for.

In the matter of food, how much have we to be grateful for. Here is an invalid who cannot touch a number of things—no doubt; but there are many things he can touch. If there are fifty things he cannot eat or drink, there are a dozen, at any rate, that he can; and let him remember that there are many people in the world who, though in health, are in such poor circumstances that they would be highly delighted if they were informed that they should have, for the rest of their lives, as much as ever they could eat and drink of a dozen things. Just think how different it might have been with you in any one point in which you are discontented, or at any rate not thankful; and then you shall see how much in that one point you have to be grateful to God.

See what you owe God for the good there is in your trial, how grateful you ought to be to Him for that.

It is a fixed idea in the mind of the child of God that the heavenly Father is good. Come what will, he knoweth that He is good, and doeth good. Whatever may be debated in his mind, that cannot be. This thought he brings into his trial. He says, *'My chastening is not for the present joyous but grievous,'* but it has an *'afterwards'* wherein it will bring forth *'peaceable fruit.'* The child of God says, *'I thank Thee, O my God, that Thou art in my trial, I am grateful that Thou art here.'*

For it need not have been thus. God might have sent us into trial without Himself at all. When we consider what our sins have been, we might have been sent all the troubles as a punishment for them, and there might have been no good in them at all. God is in my trial, and I am grateful that it is so.

And very pleased no doubt our heavenly Father is with His children, when they thus recognize Him, and are grateful to Him. He sees them appreciate Him for His own sake; He sees them honour Him, not only when everything is going smooth, but when things are dark. Their fig tree is not blossoming, neither is the fruit in their vine (Hab. iii. 17), but they rejoice in the Lord their God. If we are sure of God, we may be sure of good; and the gratitude that is thankful for a good it cannot trace as yet, is a flower very sweet before the Lord. Let us cultivate it on our sick-bed, or in our weak times. Let us feel that it is not the case that everyone else has good and we bad; let us be cheery as though we had something too. Our God is not poor to us in our illness or weakness; and we are grateful to Him that it is so.

Then there are our alleviations. These come from Him. After all, we are not always in pain, not always downcast, not always in an entirely depressed condition. The sick ones have some enjoyments—times when pain is less, or completely gone; days, or it may be only hours, when they can enjoy the air and the sun. How many little conveniences of illness, small it may be, but useful and adding to comfort, are provided. They may be no more than the rags which were provided for Jeremiah, when he was about to be pulled out of the pit, but they are useful to us as those rags were to him. (Jer. xxxviii. 12.)

To be able to pass an hour with a book that gives us pleasure; to be able to see a friend for even a few minutes; to be able to occupy ourselves in

something that interests us—all these are alleviations.

And if only sick ones would think, they would find plenty of these. Let them begin to count-up what things they have, how many things are any comfort to them, and they will soon find cause enough for gratitude. Very probably when we are grateful, and offer God our thanksgiving, He will give us further alleviation. He will see that we are making much of what we have—we turn it into a talent to glorify Him; and to him that hath shall be given. He who praises God with a little shall have more to praise Him with. Even if we never get anything in addition to what we already have, I can understand how this will come about. Our present comforts or enjoyments will become doubly pleasant to us; we shall have a clearer view of how great they are; we shall make more of them. They may not be more in themselves, but they will be more to us; and the value of things is to be estimated not by what they are in themselves, but by what they are to us.

While I am writing these pages, I get this letter, which has done me a great deal of good, and which I think will, perhaps, do you, my reader, some good too. And I insert it here because it is an example of practical gratitude, and of sweet contentment, and satisfaction with blessings which are left, although some (even of sick-estate blessings) are taken away.

Dear Sir,

*Ever since I have read your appeal for funds for the Sea-Side Home in “**The Sick Man’s Comfort Book**,” I have felt a strong desire to help in the good work, and now I am thankful to be able to send you £ 50 for the endowment of a district. I know the value of fresh air myself, and desire to show my gratitude to my Heavenly Father for many pleasant hours spent out of doors in a low Bath chair, drawn by an excellent donkey, which refreshing change is now withheld from me, not having been out of doors*

this year; but it is a great satisfaction to know that money which has hitherto been expended on myself can be used for the benefit of one of God's dear children, whose valuable life may be prolonged by having a holiday once a year. One of my great mercies is a Merlin chair, in which I can wheel myself from one room to another without assistance. I hope I am not saying too much about self, but I think, dear sir, you will excuse it, as you know that it is a pleasant thing to be thankful. I will call my contribution, "Thank-offering for mercies received by -----."

See God in everything, Him in your fire, Him in your arm-chair, Him in your pillow, Him in your cup of tea; see God in everything, and be grateful. Do not be afraid of bringing God down into small things. He will be seen as much in the dewdrop as in the ocean; just as the sun will be reflected as a whole sun in the one, as well as in the other.

Then let us think that from Him comes all we have. Let us get into the habit of tracing every good thing to Him. Let us not stop in the intermediaries—in the means. If He be the maker of every little insect and leaf, and is to be recognized as such, He is surely not to be passed by as the maker of every good and perfect gift be it never so small for His people.

There is no necessity to specify the kind of things we are to be grateful for. We must not pooh-pooh anything, as being too small and unworthy of gratitude. The roots of this beautiful plant of Gratitude are very searching, and find nourishment in very minute things; its fine fibres are very penetrating, and suck up every drop of moisture from above, and every little particle suited to them within their reach.

Gratitude is a very spreading plant as regards both root and branch. Once let it get well established in the heart and it will ramify a long way: and, even amid the stones, will find bread on which it can live and thrive.

If any one finds difficulty in being grateful for what is small, I say to him, *'Fix on some object, and see its relationship to you. See how you would be without it.'* No doubt, at the very moment you are reading these lines, there lie within your reach some objects without which you could do but badly; perhaps if they were even a little different from what they are, you would be very uncomfortable. What reflections you may have on your bed, on a cup of tea, on being able to turn in your bed, or to sit up in it; or, on being able to swallow, or to speak; or having a friend, a nurse, a fire. Work these all out; picture yourself without them, and then think of yourself with them, and you will see cause enough, even in common things, to be thankful.

I knew a man who died from starvation, simply from the presence of two little ulcers, almost minute, in his throat; and, as I attended, him day by day, he told me of his agonies as he saw a friend who sat up with him at night make some toast and eat it. The poor fellow was ravenous with hunger, but he could not swallow. Well, how would it be with you, if you suffered pangs of anguish every bit you swallowed—if you dreaded the sight of a cup of tea, and a slice of bread?

Do not be put to shame by hundreds and thousands of poor—for example, by such an one as this. The person to whom I refer was an old woman over three score years and ten, who used to live in a little back room supporting herself by waistcoat making. It was hard work for one so old, up in the morning early, beginning by daylight, and working on generally until the job in hand was finished. At last, in the winter time her strength began to decay, but strong in faith she gave glory to God. When compelled to lie in bed, and her earnings ceased, the City Missionary who went to see her heard her singing:—

'Despond then no longer, the Lord will provide!

*And this be the token,
No word He hath spoken
Was ever yet broken—
The Lord will provide.
March on then right boldly,
The pathway made glorious.
With shoutings victorious,
We'll join in the chorus—
The Lord will provide.'*

When the Missionary entered the room she said, *'The Lord is very good to me; I was reading in Luke's gospel, and I felt that I could say with many, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name."* And I said to myself, *although I have only a bit of bread in the cupboard, and a cup of tea, the Lord won't let me want; and about 12 o'clock Mrs. D (a Christian neighbour,) sent me in a little sole, and then my landlady sent me up a bit of mutton, and afterwards Miss H— (a lady who conducted a mother's meeting,) brought me a bit of fowl and a bunch of grapes; and to-day, now I cannot work, the Lord has sent me fish, flesh, fowl, fruit—oh, how good is the Lord; but,'* added the old lady, *'I can't expect friends to do this often, and I don't think I shall use the needle again, I feel my work is done, so I have decided to sell some of my furniture to raise enough money to carry me on two months, and if I find I am no better then, I shall go into the "house;" what I leave behind will bury me when I am gone. The Lord will be with me there, as well as here.'*

And it came to pass that two months after the above conversation the ambulance came, and the dear old saint was borne away to the workhouse, till she died.

The first time I visited her at the Infirmary she appeared very much better, and welcomed me very warmly; taking hold of her dress she smilingly said, *'This ain't my silk dress, but it is very comfortable'* (the old lady used to wear a nice black silk dress and Paisley shawl on the Lord's day), and pointing to her little bed, she continued, *'That's a nice bed, see how clean it is;'* and then putting her mouth to my ear, she whispered, *'Ain't the Lord kind to provide me with such a place to die in?'* and brushing away a tear she laughingly added, *'Why, I've even got a servant to make my bed.'*

Some weeks later I again visited her; this time I found her in bed and very weak, but the same happy spirit greeted me. She said, *'You can't think what sweet seasons I enjoy with my Saviour; I tell Him everything, and He takes all my troubles away. Only this morning I said to Him, 'Blessed Jesus, I'm very weak, and I won't be able to eat the bread to-day,' and He has sent me a French roll, that's how He takes all my cares away.'* On another occasion she told me that on the preceding Lord's day she had partaken for the first time of the memorials of the broken body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus; and she added, *'I shall soon see Him and be with Him forever.'*

Happy in God her Saviour, content to be an inmate of a workhouse, she continued to speak good of His name, who loved her and washed her from her sins in His own blood, who clothed her in the garments of salvation, and covered her with a robe of righteousness. Her day declined in a golden sunset, and on October the 9th, 1876, she was brought by ministering spirits unto the King, and with gladness and rejoicing she entered into the King's palace, *'to go no more out for ever.'*

God is highly honoured and served, when amid many undoubted trials, His people are grateful, and feel that they cannot speak too well of His name.

But God does not want gratitude to flower for Himself only; He wills that we should recognize the means which He employs, and be thankful to men also—His instruments to us for good.

Sick people are sometimes very ungrateful. They are captious and complaining; the very attention which they receive gives them a false importance in their own eyes, and they think that they are neglected; or that if this or that is done for them, it is only their due.

Sickness, according as we use it, may have a very bad or a good effect upon the character.

Let it have a good one on ours. Let us be thankful for every little thing that is done for us. Let us have a distinct feeling that it was kind of such and such a person to do it. Let us not so take the little things as a matter of course that, we are almost like people receiving a due.

And let us show our gratitude as well as feel it. I consider those persons very cold and unsatisfactory, who are like the parrot that spoke but little, but was said to think the more. If we are thankful, let us say so—let us give those who do us a kindness the pleasure of knowing that we are grateful for it. It is their due. It is really very disheartening to show some people kindness. Certainly God never intended that we should repay them with apparently such scanty appreciation of their goodness.

And sometimes, I think, we should show our gratitude not only for what people do for us, but for their bearing with us. How often we give trouble; how often we are unamiable, and fretful; how often have those around us to bear with us? Perhaps they are ministering to us when they themselves are

not well—when they deserve pity as much as we, although they say nothing about their ailments. Their heads perhaps often ache when they are attending to us; and so cheerful and uncomplaining are they that we know nothing about it. It is, perhaps, great self-denial to them to stay with us when they might have enjoyed themselves elsewhere; and it would, to say the least of it, be great encouragement to them if they saw that we made much of all they do for us.

It is undoubtedly God's will that we should show gratitude to one another—that we recognize His instruments as well as Himself—that in this respect as well as in all others, we render to every man his due. It may be that thus we are providing our dear ones with that which will be their richest repayment—what will be most precious to them when we are gone; what they will value more than anything we could leave them in our wills. They will then recall us, their dear ones, to their minds; they will, perhaps, be wishing and longing to have us again, if it were only to do more for us; then will come over their minds blessed remembrances of how they had done this and that for us. It is imprinted on their memories by the sweet smile with which we received that act of love; or, perhaps, if we could not smile, by the silent look of gratitude which we turned on them, and which they could read. And now all these blest memories live with them, and they have sweet calm joy in them, and they are soft subdued lights in their dark hours, and sweet low music in their silent ones, when the voice of the loved one can be heard no more. Oh, leave your dear ones sweet memories like these! God wills that you should. What a balm to the one that is left—to the wounded one—to think, to say, *'He, or she, was often grateful to me; ah, yes! I know I often made him happy, and eased his pain, or added to his little stock of pleasure while I could.'*

I frequently visit a sick lady, a dear child of God, who has been on her sick bed for many years. She is now reduced so low as to be little more than a helpless log. She is attended by a person of superior mind and manner, who appears to act towards her in the double capacity of servant and companion. This lady is very poor. She lives chiefly on the charity of friends, and when she dies will have nothing to leave. I was speaking to the excellent Christian who attends her about her devotion to the invalid, and she replied, '*Miss _____ loves me, and that is reward enough.*' I could not but look at the poor creature lying on the bed, with close-cut hair and worn face, speechless, helpless, and think of the power of love; when its being shown even by such a helpless creature as that, with nothing human to attract, was considered enough for the close attendance on a poor sick gentlewoman's room year by year;

No doubt the look of gratitude was often given, as it had been given to myself when I dropped in from time to time; and such looks, and the imperfectly-uttered words, will, perhaps, live long in that lady's attendant after she herself is dead. God has put these means of repayment, at any rate, within our reach, and let us spend what He has thus given us. Let us leave happy memories for our dear ones when we are gone. Let our sick-beds be flower-beds to them, so that (sad as the world thought them) they were flower-beds of God and man.

Yes! this Gratitude is a most useful plant A grateful man is always a happy one. He is a man who notices, and perceives himself possessed of many mercies and good things of which the unnoticing man knows nothing. He knows his own unworthiness; he has some idea of how it would be with him if God dealt with him after his sins, and rewarded him according to his iniquities; and so, instead of claiming this and that as a right, and being

angry if he does not get all he wants, he feels he has infinitely more than he deserves—probably far more than many others have; and he is full of gratitude for this. Do not look upon Gratitude as a mere flower of no use to yourself, however beautiful it may be to others. You yourself may have joy and refection from the flowers which grow upon your own sick-bed.

Then, it is very profitable in the feelings it creates in others towards us. It is natural for people to like to show still further kindness to those who are grateful for anything already done for them. I believe that God gives still more blessing to those who are grateful for what they already have received. It is true He is *'kind to the unthankful and the evil, and sendeth His rain upon the just and the unjust;'* but He says also that, *'Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Him,'* and surely none glorify Him in vain.

Gratitude is also a very useful sick-bed plant in giving us a sense of fulness, so that we do not covet other people's places, or things. What I have is good for me. If I am very grateful for my plain things, I do not trouble at not having other people's grander things—a cup of tea is as good in a white cup as if it were had in Sévres; the fire that burns on a plain hearth, and beneath a wooden chimney-piece, is so pleasant by means of its being appreciated, and one's being thankful for it, that the idea of a polished hearth, and marble, and encaustic tiles do not enter the mind. We say *'we have all things, and abound.'*

Then this blessed flower of Gratitude unfolds its colours, and sends forth its scent, and turns also to precious fruit. It fruits into Thankfulness, and Cheerfulness, and Praise, and great Content The great God, when He looks down from heaven, sees His child praising Him, appreciating Him, loving Him, thankful to Him; and the sick-beds where all this is found are more

precious in His sight than what many might perhaps call a fairer scene, counting beauty not by real worth but outward show.

May this plant of Gratitude so flourish with all the people of God in their trials, that their estate may be hallowed before their Lord; and the sick-bed of the Saint be in the growth of this precious plant—the Flower-bed of God.

Chapter Five

The Flower of Hope

‘What though each spark of earth-born rapture fly,
The quivering lip, pale cheek, and closing eye.
Bright to the soul thy seraph hands convey
The morning dream of life’s eternal day.’

Campbell.

PART I.

He who loses Hope loses all. To him life becomes a blank: abroad he wanders beneath a sunless heaven, at home he sits beside a fireless hearth. The man is a bankrupt with nothing in the pound; blotted out of life, if one gives any true meaning to the word *‘life’* at all—a sapless, flower-less, seedless stump; of whom, unless some miracle be wrought, nothing can be made in the domains of God or man. Such a condition as this, it is not God’s will to apportion to the sick-bed. No such weed is planted by any save an enemy’s hand in the flower-beds of God. On the contrary, a flower, which is in all points the opposite of such a weed, is planted by the

Heavenly Gardener; He gives it to us to cherish, and He loves to see it thrive.

Hope is pre-eminently a heavenly seed. How far it flourished in Eden, how far it was needed there we cannot tell; our concern with it has reference to the present, when it is sorely needed —to earth, and life as it now is, which, without it, could be nothing but a wilderness.

When God smote man so severely for his sin in Eden, and sent him forth into the wide world, the staff that He put into His trembling hand was Hope. He took good care that His banished child should not go forth hopeless. Restoration was in God's eye, and to restoration belongs Hope. One or other of two evils must follow hopelessness; either an apathy like death, or the raging of reckless despair; and neither of these were intended to be part of Adam's punishment. That first promise was the foundation-stone of Hope.

God knows what Hope is, and what Hope can do; and as it can have no true root but in and from Him, He sees Himself honoured whenever it is found flourishing on the sickbed, where there is so much against it.

The old Bible saints knew something about Hope. They said, '*The hope of the righteous shall be gladness*' (Prov. x. 20). '*Happy is he whose hope is in the Lord his God*' (Ps. cxlvi. 15). They knew the root of Hope. '*Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee.*' (Ps. xxxix. 7). '*Be of good courage all ye that hope in the Lord*' (Ps. xxxi. 2). '*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? hope thou in God*' (Ps. xlii. 5). There was fainting of soul, but it still hoped in God's word (Ps. cxix. 81). '*I will hope continually, and will yet praise Him more and more*' (Ps. lxxi. 14). For a season Job lost it: '*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope*' (Job vii. 6): but it revived

again; and many a time has it drooped in the hearts of afflicted ones since his day; and if the Owner of the garden had not himself watered and tied up the poor storm-stricken plant, it might have perished altogether.

Jesus Himself walked this earth in hope. He had *'the joy set before Him.'* He was no hopeless man. A star ever shone from heaven, throwing its light athwart His sea of troubles. Christ was a man of Hope as well as Faith. It was needful that He should have in Himself the perfection of every distinctive grace; and so, whatever is the difference between Hope and Faith, that was in Him.

But now we have to do with the sick-bed, or its equivalent, the sick condition and estate of each one, whatever that may be.

There is much hopefulness in life, for which there is, so to speak, no thanks to a man. For example, when a person has health, and strength, and youth, and naturally buoyant spirits; when all goes well with him; when there is a good or fair prospect before him; when the likelihood of things is favourable, it is not much wonder if a man be hopeful: it would be rather wonderful if he were not. There is nothing especially God-honouring in hope here. But it is different in the estate of sickness. Then the heart and the flesh naturally fail; then things wear a leaden hue; then a man is thrown closely upon God; and when, under these circumstances, Hope exists, it is a beautiful flower in His eyes.

Hope is a plant that has many enemies. It is not like Gratitude, which flourishes by the help of what it gets to feed upon; it must grow often, so to speak, upon nothing. It is like an air plant. Yes, more wonderful still, it has to live in the midst of a tainted and poisoned atmosphere, it has often to flourish in spite of impediments; and then for a man to have a hopeful spirit in God, is honouring to Him in extreme.

We may be brought to that state spoken of by the Apostle (i Cor. xv. 19), ***'if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men the most miserable;'*** but *'other-life hope,'* God-resting hope, if it exist under these circumstances, is God-honouring hope; and there is such a thing as holding ***'the rejoicing of this hope firm to the end.'*** (Heb. iii. 6).

Most things are precious in proportion to the difficulty of getting and keeping them; and the difficulty of rearing a plant will make it much more valuable; and God, who knows all things, knows well the real difficulties with which Hope has to contend, and prizes the plant that blooms in spite of them all

Indeed in this respect Hope has a preciousness of its own above Faith. For Faith depends upon the word spoken; Hope often has nothing to depend upon; it is just a springing of the heart to God Himself—an expectation from Him, very often the *'why'* of which we cannot tell.

This Hope is a beautiful plant throwing out blossoms at the most unexpected times. We know how we value a rose in the winter; and God values the flowers of the unlikely times, and places.

Sometimes Hope gets terribly cut down, an unexpected blow crushes it: its little tendril that had crept up and adorned the naked wall of our trial state is rudely detached by the beating of some stormy wind and tempest, and it seems as though we could never hope again; but, lo! up comes the little plant with a perseverance and vitality that is surprising. The storm only caught its tendrils and could not penetrate its roots, and then in a short time it is again as green, as pushing, as clasping, as ever; clinging to the old naked set of circumstances just as it did before, and able to repeat this process over and over again; like Abraham of old (Rom. iv. 18), ***'against hope believing in hope;'*** and thus it goes on, even to the end.

Then, it is a plant often proving itself independent of present circumstances. Indeed, all we have said, circumstances seem dead against it. A sick-bed, or sick estate, is often one of the most unlikely spheres for hopefulness; and God accounts that precious which, overpassing human likelihood, is able to do so much simply because of its life-draught from Himself, simply because, even without specific promises to go upon, it looks to Him to do it good; though the 'how,' or even the 'what,' of that good, may be entirely unknown.

So then, sick man or woman, be encouraged from the fact that on your sick-bed, or in your sick estate, there can be reared a flower so acceptable to God as this.

I do not tell you to hope particularly for this or that—the hopeful spirit is the precious flower. Your condition is one in which by this spirit you can, independently of circumstances, glorify God. That in itself is a comfort; even though not one of your hopes came to anything, that will be no hindrance to God? being glorified. He will look at the spirit you show, and not at the mistakes you make, in hoping for this or that.

It is hard, oh, how hard! to some, weighted on every side, with the heavens above them like lead, and the earth beneath them like brass, thus to glorify God. The very make of their nature is against it—the peculiarity of their ailment is against it, special circumstances are against it. We may be so situated that we really cannot put our finger here or there on any one outgo of hope, and say, '*I hope for this or that. I hope to get well*'—or '*I hope to be better;*' or '*I hope for the alleviation of this pain.*' I think the best thing we can do under these circumstances is to detach ourselves from things special, and simply to say, '*I hope in God.*' Do not want to fix yourself, or pin yourself down to any specific expectation—do not let

others so fix you—leave it indefinite. If any one questions you about yourself, just say, *'I am hoping in God'* — that will be definite enough for Him. He will know the meaning of that: perhaps He will say with great approval, *'I am enough for that poor soul, though there is not a single human probability in view.'* Something good, you may depend upon it, will come out of such a Hope as this—it will be esteemed a flower fit for the paradise of God.

PART II.

His flower of Hope, so honourable to God, and so precious in His sight, is of immense use to man. It is no exception to the rule that all which truly honours God is, in the best sense of the word, beneficial to man; even as all that is truly good for man is in some way honourable to God* For every good and perfect gift springs from Him, and He must be recognised in it, and thanked for it.

When the sick-bed of man is the flower-bed of God this sweet blossoming will be found therein. Beautiful colours adorn it, sweet perfume distils from it; and, moreover, it is rich in medicinal virtues for the soul, and even for the body too. Coleridge says:—'In the treatment of nervous cases, he is the best physician who is the most ingenious inspirer of hope.' And the poet Cowley carries its virtues farther still:—

*'Hope of all ills that men endure,
The only cheap and universal cure!
Thou captive's freedom, and thou sick man's health;
Thou lover's victory, and thou beggar's wealth!'*

One of Hope's blessed effects upon the sick man is cheerfulness. God does not approve of sour sick-beds, sofas, arm-chairs. He looks at the sick estate which grows nothing but these as sour soil. Do not run away with

things, good reader; you are not expected to dance upon crutches; or to sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, with a hoarse sore throat; or to roll your eyes about in an ecstasy when they are heavy from sleeplessness or lustreless with pain. God knows these times, when there is no outward instrumentality or machinery for cheerfulness. But these times are not on us always. Even when they are, there may be a quiet cheerfulness; but God knows all, though those near and dear to us do not (and how often we do not wish that they should), and He knows whether in these trial times our heart be set the right way or no.

But in a general way we may be cheery. God knows it is often hard. The nature of some ailments is such that they bring depression with them as a part of their very selves. And our God, who knows this, will make much of a very feeble smile, smiled under such circumstances as these.

But let us aim at this cheerfulness. Blessed Hope will help us to it. Let us set to and hope—*'hope for what'* you say. Well, I answer, perhaps for nothing in particular—*'hope thou in God.'* Be expecting that One who loves you and who has all resources at His command will do something for you. Never mind if folk laugh at you, or say *'this is unreasonable;'* you just try it, and see if it will not do you good. You shall not feel forsaken. You shall feel that you have a future—that something lies before you. You shall have cheerfulness out of a store of which the world has not the key.

'I am cheerful, more or less (even, perhaps, the sadly little I am), because I am in union with God in this illness of mine;' that is honouring to Him, and makes our sick-bed His flower-bed.

Then Hope peoples and stores the future. It says, *'It will not be always to-day.'* To-day is the time of pain, the present is not in itself joyous, but grievous, but there is a *'beyond,'* and that *'beyond'* is yours, where there

shall be all strength, all health, all power of action, all wealth, no loneliness, no penury, no weariness. Hope lends us her telescope; and God is pleased when he sees us believing in His future, glad in it, expecting much of it. God, we are told in Rom. viii. 20, has subjected creation to its troubles in hope, and in the same way we are subjected to ours.

No doubt, many human hopes are shut out of the sick estate. But then, this only helps to make the sick-bed of the saint still more the flower-bed of God. For *'the less of this cold earth, the more of heaven'*—the less of man, the more of God. Perhaps what God says as He sees His sick child looking to Him, and Him alone, is something like this, *'My child has not allowed the darkness around to hide Me from his eyes. He honours Me by expecting from Me some good thing; not because of any specific promise I have made him, which my truth would secure; but because he believes I am good, and so must do good.'* And He will do us good, for none ever looked unto Him, and were ashamed, and disappointed. Then, Hope is very helpful in not only making us look forward, but also in helping us to leave the past behind.

How often we are dwelling in the past, as regards both its good and bad things. As to our sick estate, when we are in it, we are often sorely troubled about our past sins and follies—the bad old past. Now Hope says look on, not back. Let the dead bury their dead, look for a restoration of the years which the palmer-worm, and the caterpillar, and the locust have eaten. God has cast your sins behind His back, do not want to go behind God; do not want to go down into the depths of the sea, to find out what has become of the sins which God has sunk down there. A terrible depression is capable of connecting itself with dead past things if we will allow it so to do—a dangerous miasm can rise from them; their hampering influences can hang like dead weights about us. Hope says *'onward;'* and God, the God of Life,

of Hope, wants you to live amid the living and not amid the dead; He says, *'Come out from among the tombs, and look onward, on the streakings of the dawn; be watching in hope for the sun so soon to rise.'*

But what about the good things? *'We are ready enough,'* say some, *'to leave the bad behind, and let them be forgotten; but we cannot help looking regretfully at the enjoyments and comforts of former times.'* *'Ah,'* says someone, *'I regret the time when I used to be able to walk, and ride, and work, when I could eat anything, when the day was not half long enough for all I had to do;'* and so on, until a long list of good things is gone through.

But they are all gone, and to tarry amid such thoughts is to cry after spilt milk. Hope says *'do not fix your eyes on withered leaves which once were bright and green, but on the buds which, if you will look upon the bare trees, you can find in plenty on the branches as preparations for a coming spring. Those good things had their day. That day has ended. It lasted the time it was meant to last, and now another day is coming. The past has slipped from you, the future is yours—onward—onward—look out—look far, look with belief, hope for great things; it is your privilege to project yourself into the future.'* And all this vigorous growth is beautiful in the Lord's eyes, and makes the sick bed of the saint a flower-bed of God.

Yes! it greatly glorifies Him; it brings into His domain property of which Satan by unbelief, and sourness, and despondency would rob him—Grace makes a flower-bed for God where natural circumstances would have made a wilderness.

And who can tell what great good we may do to others by such sick-bed experiences!

Depend upon it, there are as hopeless people on their two legs as on their back; and the sick man may, if he be hopeful and cheerful, be the physician,

and prop, and helper, of the man that is well. It was a little mouse that let the lion out of the net It was a poor man that delivered the strong city. God chooses the weak ones of the world to show light out of the broken pitchers.

If those who are well in health, but hopeless in mind, or as to worldly circumstances, see you cheerful and hopeful in your trial, you may infuse into them some of your own spirit. You may be the one used of God to strengthen the feeble knees, and lift up the arms that hang down. That may be a part, of the ministry which God has assigned to your sick-bed—a part of the honour He puts upon you—a part of the triumph He gives you.

And now, as regards the far higher matter of our spiritual hope. To live in hope is what God designs in all His people—for all who would take hold of this great truth. How often we meet with people ready to lie down in despair as regards spiritual things. It is often Satan's plan to try and cast a man into despair. He knows well that it is death for the soul. Once down in that horrible pit, there would be no energy to stir, nothing but darkness and sitting still till the end comes.

False hopes—which, indeed, should not be called hopes at all, but heart-deceivings—have ruined many; and when they come to ruin, Satan would never help a man to something on a good foundation, but would persuade him that all is lost—there remains now nothing but despair. Always remember that despair is death. The words of good old John Douname should be remembered, *'As desperation is a sin in its own nature most grievous, so also is it to ourselves most pernicious; for whereas other sins make us worthy of the torments of hell and eternal condemnation, this, as it is above all the rest, entitleth us unto all the right of this hellish inheritance, so also it entereth us into the most certain and present possession thereof, even whilst we live upon the earth. For what are the torments of a*

despairing conscience but the flashings of hell fire? and what are their blasphemies which they utter against God, and the impatient cursings of their accursed selves, but the yelling of damned souls? And, therefore, if we would not cast ourselves into the jaws of hell, if we would not, whilst we live, begin to die an everlasting death, let us in no case suffer ourselves to be plunged, with the violence of Satan's temptations, into this bottomless pit of utter desperation.'

This good old divine took a strong view of the matter, but he is right—despair means death here, and death hereafter too.

Let our whole spiritual life be one of hope. Hope is one of the graces to be added to others (Rom. v. 4); it does not make ashamed

(v 5); we are said even to be '*saved by it*,' we are '*to abound in it*;' it passes beyond this life (i Cor. xv. 19); it is '*laid up for us in heaven*;' it is bound up with the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have only to run your eye down the column of a Concordance, to see the preciousness and importance of it in Scripture.

In whatever aspect we view our spiritual life it should be one of Hope. What is there, whichever way we turn, but Hope-food. It lies all around us, as the manna did round the tents of the Israelites. The whole breath of the New Testament savours of reconciliation, and love, and a beautiful future, for anyone who will simply take Christ. The present position is one of acceptance, the future prospect is all bright. '*Ye are washed*,' says St. Paul (i Cor. vi. 2), '*ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*' '*There is now no condemnation.*' says he (Rom. viii. 1), '*to them that are in Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*'

And all the future that belongs to such a present is, and must be, bright *'Made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.'* as it is said in Titus iii. 7; *'Begotten again to a lively hope,'* as St. Peter says; we have heaven, and that forever before us—something which we describe by such words as *'brightness'* and *'glory'* and *'wealth'* and *'joy,'* but which, in all probability, infinitely transcends anything we understand thereby.

For my own part, I see no reason why Hope, which is one of God's choicest gifts, and which has done so much for us through life, should lie down and die on the threshold of that heaven to which it was so instrumental in bringing us. Why should Hope not live in heaven as well as on earth, and be a perennial source of exhilaration to the saints, ever leading them to look to their Father for yet more and more—ever for some fresh joy to come! This Hope may, for aught we can tell, be one of the special bonds between God and us for the future; we may be ever thinking and saying, *'Our Father will show us more and more. He will give us more and more;'* we cannot come to the end of His good things, and we never would. It is a grand vision—an eternity, exhilarated by Hope.

And, lastly, bear this in mind; the good effects of Hope, in a physical point of view, are very great. A doctor is much to be pitied who has a hopeless patient. Hope gives his medicine a chance; it vivifies the depressed vitality of the man. The inspiration of Hope has in itself performed many a cure, and helped in the performance of many more.

So strongly did the poet feel what Hope could do, that he said—

*'Cease every joy to glimmer on my mind,
But leave—ah! leave the light of Hope behind!
What though my hours of bliss have been,
Like Angels' visits, few and far between,*

*Her musing mood shall every pang appease,
And charm, when pleasures lose the power to please.'*

Campbell's Pleasures of Hope.

May this plant then flourish in our sick estate. It will be all the more beautiful and precious for the untowardness of the soil and climate in which it has to grow. And the Great Owner of the garden will prize it, and will give commandment that none shall hurt it.

May all our tribulation then work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, which shall not make us ashamed. (Rom. v. 4.)

May we **'abound in hope through the Holy Ghost.'** (Rom. xv. 3.)

Our valley of Achor may be to us a door of hope; and what the world often finds it so hard to keep alive, with all its advantages of health, and wealth, and prosperity, may be seen flourishing in what to it seems a dry and barren soil, but what is in truth the Sick-bed of the saint, and the Flower-bed of God.

*Oh, sure, if I till sorrow's field,
And make it such bright blossoms yield,
My work for Thee shall be at last revealed.*

*If in the wilderness I raise
The song of thankfulness and praise,
Shall I not sing for aye in brighter days.*

anon.

Chapter Six

The Flower of Praise

This is not a common flower upon the sick-bed, even of the saints. It is rare all the world over, but rarer upon the sick-bed than anywhere. More is the pity. For Praise would make this poor earth more like heaven; and would not only honour the God to whom it is offered, but would bless and make happy the one who offered it. The cultivator of this plant would be all the richer for growing it, even as the Owner of the garden graciously considers Himself all the more honoured by possessing it *‘Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.’*

Many would, no doubt, consider the sick estate one very fit indeed for Prayer, but they cannot see what there is in it for which Praise is suitable. They are weak, and perhaps irritable; they are apparently in a much worse position than those in health; their discomforts are many; and altogether they do not see what there is to praise for. They think it is quite right to be contented, and to hope, and to pray, and so forth; but Praise is a little too strong—they don’t think their soil will rear such a plant.

But, beloved, we must raise it. I say we must. We must not have our gardens lacking a beautiful flower in which the Master especially delights. He must never come into His garden, and see His gardeners not even making an attempt to cultivate one of the choicest plants there is.

Perhaps you say, *'It is easy for people who are well off, and who have no pains, no bodily weakness, weariness, or distress, to praise; put me in their circumstances, and see how I will sing.'* Ah, my friend, a thrush will sing as sweetly perched upon a thorn hedge as on the blossoming spray of an apple-tree; it matters not to him whether there are nettles or roses hard by, his thrush-nature will, in each case, make him sing. If you were given all you wish for, you might be too much occupied with the pursuits of health to have time to praise; your heart might be scattered about so much here and there, as many a man's heart is, that you could not gather it in on God, and see Him, and see what He is, and what He has done, which should call forth your praise.

If people will sing in God's garden, they must do so on His terms and not their own—in the circumstances in which He places them, and not in those which they would appoint, but cannot appoint for themselves. They must be able to say with the Psalmist, ***'I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall be continually in my mouth.'*** (Ps. xxxiv. 1.)

We must grow this plant beneath our own leaden skies, and amid inhospitalities of our own soil, and must not be thinking what we would rear under sunnier climes, and in richer land.

Who knows the soil of the garden so well as the owner? Who knows the difficulties and impediments of a sick-bed so well as the One who appoints the estate of illness? Who will give the honest gardeners so much praise and such a rich reward, as the One who knows all they have to contend with?

Therefore, at the very outset, we have immense encouragement. The great Owner of the garden is coming to look for this very plant; He admires and likes it, and intends to pluck its flower when He finds it. He means to be pleased with the gardeners who raise it—to praise them, and reward them. He will be sure to think that there is something amiss with the gardener who does not rear this plant. And altogether, things will be quite wrong in the garden if it be not there.

This being the case; let us now turn our attention to thinking how we shall rear this flower, so that our sick estate shall be one of pleasure in the eyes of God, and of profit to ourselves.

As flowers have the same soil to grow out of, and the same atmospheric elements to live upon, however different they may be in themselves, and to a certain extent must have the same treatment, so it is in the garden of the Lord. And hence Contentment, and Gratitude, and Praise may all, more or less, flourish on the same elements.

And so, if we look back to what has been said on the flower of Gratitude, there shall we find much that will be useful as regards this flower of Praise also. But let us treat it a little while by itself. This flower grows best in the immediate neighbourhood of all other beautiful plants, like Contentment, and Gratitude, and Humility, and Hope—indeed, it might almost be said not to grow except in such company, but its main vitality comes from sources independent of them.

The great way of growing this plant is by thought on God Himself—on what He is in Himself, and what He is to us. If we are dependent on shreds of blue sky and stray sun-peeps, we shall never grow it; these are all very helpful, but they are not certain; we shall never do much if we rest on them.

No! we must go deep down, or high up (whichever way we wish to describe it) to be able to do anything so hard as praise on a sick-bed, or when dragging out our days in weariness. And we can get no deeper, no higher, than God Himself. If our praise spring out of our knowledge of Him, our realisation of Him, we shall sing, when even those near and dear to us can see no ground for any joy, no theme for any song. It was in God Himself that the prophet was able to rejoice when the olive, and the vine, and the cattle failed. We can only praise God by knowing God; and we can know Him only by seeing what He is, as revealed in His word; and by prayer to Him to manifest Himself to us; and by thinking about Him, and all that He is in Himself.

Set this down as a certainty in your minds: God will always reveal Himself to those who desire to know Him.

Want to know more about God—about *'lengths, and depths, and breadths, and heights'* (Eph. iii. 18), about *'love which passeth knowledge,'* about *'unsearchable riches,'* about the *'greater love which no man hath than this.'* Want not so much to see Him in this gleam of prosperity and in that, as in Himself; want to know Him for Himself; look up above medicine bottles, and what you can eat and drink, and your little outings, and alleviations, and all these incidents of your ailments, up into His own face; and then you shall see His face, and it shall be a Father's, and you shall rejoice and praise.

There is no such way of attaining to a praising spirit, as by looking into the face of the One who is *'worthy to be praised.'*

You may look also at what He is to you. A good gardener likes to have his flowers developed to the utmost—their colour the most brilliant, their

perfume the richest, their various parts perfect. Anything that will help us is valuable.

Now think not only of God in Himself, but of God in connection with you. Think of what He might have been—only a Judge. He has not dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. Praise Him that He has not entered into conflict with your poor flesh and blood, and failing heart; contending with you, so that the spirit should fail before Him. You know He might have done it. It would have been all right and just; you could have only veiled your face (and I hope you feel that is all you would have done) and said, ***‘Righteous and true are all Thy ways, Thou King of saints.’***

But He has done none of this. He has not entered into that judgment with you, in which no man living shall be justified. On the other hand He has said, ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions. —Like as a father pitieth his children, so do I pity you who fear me. I am just, and yet the Justifier of you who believe in Jesus.’

And I will praise Thee, O my God, for this. I look at myself, and think how much evil I know about myself; I think, Oh! what mountains are there of iniquity of which I know nothing, but they are all known to Thee. I do praise Thee that Thou hast been willing to be something besides a judge to me; it was just out of Thine own will that Thou hast acted thus graciously. I shudder to think what Thou mightest have been; I praise and glorify Thee, when I think what Thou art.

And what is He? what in this illness? what does He choose to be? A Father, and not a Judge; a Friend, and not a Judge; a Provider,

and not a Judge; a Sympathiser, and not a Judge. To Him I will trace, as far as my human powers will permit, every good thing I have in this illness;

and where, by reason of my short sight, I cannot trace any more, I will believe that it comes from Him, the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift.

‘Thus when Thou comest into Thy Garden, O my Lord, by Thine own grace helping me, Thou Thyself having by Thy Spirit taught Thy gardener how to grow the plant Thou lovest, Thou shalt have blooming for Thee this fresh bright-coloured plant of Praise. I will be not only amongst those who enter into Thy courts with praise (Ps. c. 4), in the assembly of the elders (Ps. cvii. 32), in the heights (cxlviii. i), in the dance (cxlix. 3), in the sanctuary, and the firmament of Thy power (cl. 1), but I will be one of those of whom it is said, *‘Let the saints sing aloud upon their beds’* (cxlix. 5); I will be one of the poor and needy who praise Thy name (lxxiv. 21). Like Jonah (ii.) we may be encompassed about even unto the soul, the depth may close round about us, the weeds be wrapped about our head; but even there we will talk of *‘the voice of thanksgiving,’* and try and praise Him with all our hearts.

But He must help us to do this. It is only out of His own gifts that we can render unto the Lord. Let us not adventure on any promises or determinations to praise, except by the help of the Spirit of Praise. And we shall have His help. The good Lord will not have His poor servant, who greatly wants to rear the plant he knows his Master likes, sent away, because he is ignorant or unskilful. On the contrary, He will have him taught and helped, and He will not refuse to pluck and be pleased with a flower because it is imperfect. He will take it, such as it is, when it is the best we can produce at the time; and we, instead of spending our time and strength in condemning ourselves that our praise has been so poor, may

spend it much more profitably and happily in blessing God that He accepts it, and is pleased with it, such as it is.

The Spirit, indeed, must help us, but we, too, must do our part. And sometimes, we have to be very determined with ourselves to be able to raise a sound at all. We muse long before the fire kindles. But let us be determined with ourselves. Let us only make a beginning. Let us get the first bar or two. We shall perhaps soon get into the spirit of the thing. Many a good fire has been hard to kindle at first. Do something—make a beginning. If you cannot sing a hymn of thanksgiving, hum it; and if you cannot even hum it, then read it; remember that the sweetest, mellowest, ay, and the loudest too, of the instruments of music entrusted to the choir on earth, are given to the sick folk; but the instruments will not play of themselves. Please God we will play them. *‘Bless the Lord, O my soul; and ail that is within me, bless His holy name’* (see all Psalm ciii). O my God, on my little garden-plot graciously help me, that when Thou comest to my sick bed there may never be wanting there a flower of praise for Thee to pluck and Thee to own.

And now, as regards ourselves. It will encourage us much in our raising, in our sick estates, this flower, and all kindred flowers for God, if we remember that it is the Master’s will that the gardeners should themselves have enjoyment of the flowers.

No owner of a garden on earth could say to his gardener, ‘The flowers shall have no colour for you, but only for me; nor shall they have any perfume for you either; I, and I only, shall have any enjoyment from them.’ The good God does not allow that. The ox is not to be muzzled that treadeth out the corn.

And in the heavenly garden it is thus likewise. All that is productive of glory to God is productive also of good to man. And so we cannot praise without being the better for praising.

Here are some of the good things which the spirit of Praise may do for us. The very nature of Praise is exhilarating. But *'I will hope continually,'* says the Psalmist, *'and will yet praise Thee more and more.'* Just as gloomy and unhappy tempers and thoughts have a tendency to increase, so bright and happy ones have a like tendency. We know how merriment grows upon us in ordinary life; and cheeriness of spirit, shewn in thanksgiving and praise, does so in the spiritual life too. If you want to get on, then start. Strike up the first bar; you will soon find that your music is set to quick time; you will drop into no dull minors of complaining, or unreasonable, or depressed thoughts.

Moreover, such is the nature of Praise that it will reveal yet more causes of Praise. The more we enter into any subject, the more do we find out about it; it opens out. You do not know how much you have to praise for, until you begin. Now begin at once. Perhaps you have to learn your notes; well, never mind, begin.

I do not mind giving a music lesson for once. Now, dear friend, can you see nothing to be thankful and to praise for even in your sick-room?

'Well, perhaps this bed.'

Good, I will begin with the bed. Now try:—

'O Lord, I thank Thee for this bed;

Full many a blessed saint

Has lain with an unpillowed head,

Though weary, sick, and faint.'

A very neat little verse, embracing a pillow as well as a bed, two things to praise for. Now verse two, if you please:—

*'I thank Thee, Lord, that whilst Thy Saints
Of old went naked oft,
I have, to cover my poor frame,
These bed-clothes warm and soft.
'Thy early followers I know
Were oft an hungered;
But I, on dainty Sick-man's fared
I thank Thee, Lord, am fed.
'Thy loved ones oft have been compelled
In caves and dens to hide;
I thank Thee, in tins well-built room,
In comfort I abide.
'I thank Thee, Lord, for, all in one,
Sight, feeling, hearing, smell,
The brilliant flowers, the cheerful books,
The friends I love so well!
'The peaceful intervals from pain,
The, dream of health restored;
For passing or abiding good
Alike I thank Thee, Lord.'*

Excellent! a first-rate pupil! I asked you for a second verse, and you have given me five. And when I count them up I find in those five verses no less than twelve blessings are enumerated, which, with the bed and pillow, make fourteen.

I do not object to the poetry because it is not of a high order; a great deal of very mongrel verse coming from the heart gets up to heaven when grand verse, which only comes from the head, has to stop on earth. Go on, and prosper, and sing away; a child's song is always pleasant to a father's ear.

And now if thus much can be made of even these common mercies, oh, look from them up to the everlasting rest, up to the Saviour's pillow, giving you His own blessed rest in Paradise, up to the provisions for eternity, up to all God's sparings, all God's lovings ; and you will be no longer like a little linnet, joyous as that little creature is in its song, but like a full band; and the best music you can make, you will find all too little for setting forth what you feel.

Surely it will inspirit you, if you feel that this spirit of Praise gives you companionship with the heavenly host They have much to do with praise. Are you doing on earth what they are doing in heaven? Yes! we on our beds, or sofas, or in our arm-chairs, or creeping about little better than so many worms on the earth, are in fellowship with the great musicians of the skies—one with those whose Alleluias are heard in the anthems of heaven. And it may be that our praise, being offered under more difficult circumstances than theirs, may be more precious in the ears of God.

Yes, be persuaded that Praise is a great ministry; and all the more so, because so few are engaged in it. It is not every Garden of the Lord that grows much of this flower, or grows' it to perfection. You have the opportunity of growing something rare. Go in, then, for that culture. You need not be afraid of its superseding other flowers. On the contrary, where they grow best, it will grow best.

Remember that, this ministry to God is within your power when other ministries may not be. You may not be able to visit the poor, or to do

anything outwardly, but you can do this. Too feeble, perhaps, may you be to even hum a tune, but you can *‘make melody in your heart unto the Lord.’*

It is into the heart the Owner of the garden will come to look for His pleasant plants. The grateful and praising spirit is what He will prize.

And there, upon your sick-bed, or in your sick estate, He will see you fulfilling the first draft design of your being.

God made man for His praise. Go all the world over, and you see man failing that design. But you may fulfil it. He may find in you, amid your pains, and aches, and sorrows, what He cannot find amid the bright and busy places of the earth; and so in this pre-eminently it may be true, that the ‘Sick-bed of the Saint’ is the ‘Flower-bed of God.’

Chapter Seven

The Flower of Resignation

*'Then I will meekly yield me up
To suffer all Thy will;
I know the seeming bitter cup
Overflows with mercy still:
In every cross I see,
The crown that waits for me,
Thy patience shines and beckons on,
Until the starry heights are won.'*

Wolfgang Dessler, A.D. 1660.

*'Be still, my throbbing heart, be still,
Cast off thy weary load,
And make His holy will thy will,
And rest upon thy God.'*

Pastor Josephsen.

There are some flowers which are more closely imitated by weeds than others. Where the resemblance is great, it may require a skilful

botanist to discover the difference, but on a close inspection he will certainly do so.

Weeds, which are generally like flowers, grow up from time to time in the garden of the Lord generally; and in the flower-beds of which we are now speaking, particularly.

It is impossible to grow flowers without having trouble with weeds of some kind; and in the present case the weed and the flower are very much alike.

But the owner of the garden can discern infallibly between the two. All things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do.

Now God is a lover of these flowers of which this little book speaks, and He will look with a skilful eye on all the plants—if our sick-beds are to be His flower-beds, He must know all about everything that is growing there. He will look at us all with a discerning eye.

Amongst the sick-bed flowers there is perhaps not one which is so likely to be counterfeited as Resignation; and none about which there can be so easily a mistake.

For we may mistake mere apathy for it—the dead, heavy weight of the lethargy of illness—the lack of interest in outward things which is engendered by our own want of vitality, or our enforced seclusion, and retirement from activity.

We may get into a spirit of '*don't care*,' and mistake that for Resignation. Or perhaps, we get possessed of the thought '*we can't help it, and therefore must make the best of it*;' and all we know about Resignation may be embodied in the old rhymes, '*What can't be cured must be endured*.'

I grant we may seem very resigned under the influence of these feelings, but such Resignation is not of any value in the sight of God. It is not His

beautiful flower. Underneath the semblance of true Resignation may exist great rebellion against God. We would start up from under His hand, if we could. We lie still from pressure, and not because we will God's will to be ours. There may be a great deal of philosophy and practical wisdom in making the best of what cannot be helped, but nothing of religion at all. No doubt this flower is very hard to be grown. It meets with many impediments. It involves giving up a great deal. For example: this child of God in the sick estate, if not actually on the sick bed, has yet to surrender health and all its joys—its elastic spring, its interest even in the common business of life, its happiness in many relationships. The very joy of living, some people will tell you, is very great; but you know nothing of it, and have to be content so to do.

And it is thus with health's profits. There are few of the world's honours, and very little of its gains, for the sick. They cannot come forward in the rush and scramble, where such things, for the most part, are struggled for and won. It has been said that, to be a great man one must have a strong head and a strong digestion—many a one with the first has failed in life for want of the second.

Let no one make little of this. It is a real trial, and must be met with a real grace. And that which does meet it is noble in God's sight and precious too—that which meets it by a distinct relationship to God because it is His will—that which says, '*Not my will but Thine be done.*'

For, remember, what has to be borne is not one short sharp stroke, one great disappointment, and then all is over. After the thunderstorm some flowers, at least, will lift up their heads again. But there are conditions of illness which crush life's prospects for all its days, and none of its ordinary

flowers or fruits are to be found any more; and a man must come into close relationship with God to make him resign himself in peace to this.

But, perhaps, the reader's is not such a heavy trial as this—there may be a *'future'* in this life before you. -Well, if there be, then be still and quiet now—the time for the blooming of this precious flower of Resignation is passing fast; as soon as you are well it will be gone. And do not think within yourself, *'When I get well I shall have been put back so far—I shall have lost so much ground, or so much of my time, or my life; if only this illness had not come, where should I not have been by this!'* Ah! remember how many there are who will have no recovery like yours—whose illness is permanent and not temporary; who will never rise buoyantly on the stream's surface any more. No! Resignation will take this loss, this *'putting back'* as part of what God designed; and there is peace about it—it is all right, all well.

And now all this involves a great deal. In the first place it involves victory over oneself. This Resignation will not come of itself, it will not root without many struggles. Our pride at being left *'nobody'*—at being passed by every one, little as well as big, in the race of life, has to succumb. Our envy at seeing others promoted, and we ourselves passed by, has to be extinguished. All of *'self'* has to be put low, and we have to say, ***'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thine eyes.'*** ***'Even so, Father'*** —oh, if we will only say that over and over again—clasp our hands and say it—look up to heaven and say it—whisper it to God—cry it in our agonies to God; it will be the blooming of this flower of Resignation—it will be God's honour, and our own peace.

This Resignation involves also satisfaction with God. We feel our nothingness, His greatness; we yield ourselves as into the hands of One all-

wise and good—One whose word, whose plans must have no doubts concerning them in our minds.

You are not resigned if you are always thinking, *'I wish He had planned it otherwise for me;'* it is as much as to say, *'I know best what would have been for my truest happiness and good, and that is not what He has appointed.'* When we say, *'He might have done something else for me;'* or *'what He has done He might have done in some other way, I only put up with this because I cannot help it;'* then we are all wrong, we are not resigned at all.

And the true Resignation will bring us great inward peace. We shall be spared ever so much chastisement—ever so much wrestling with God, in which He must prevail. We shall say:—

*'O Lord my God, do Thou Thy holy will—
I will be still;
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm,
And break the charm
Which lulls me, clinging to my Father's breast,
In perfect rest.'* Keble.

We bring upon ourselves from time to time many aggravations of our troubles. These did not, properly speaking, belong to the trouble at all; we grafted them on it; we contended with God, and had to be taught to lie still. In proportion to our resignation will be our peace. Let us not then have this flower flabby and lifeless in the garden of the Lord. Its nature may be, and no doubt is, to have a pensile head and modest colour; but let life be ever in the stem, and leaf, and flower; and when the Lord visits us, and lifts the head of this flower and looks at its petals and leaves, let Him see it perfect in its kind.

Let our eyes be open to the good of the state we have accepted at His hand; let us never think that the all-good God can have called us to resign ourselves to unmitigated evil. Full of trial, no doubt, our condition may be; but full of blessing it also undoubtedly is. We can never grow this grace unless we know God Himself, and believe in Him without any faltering and doubt. There can be no real resignation where there is questioning. We have peace, when all is left with Him.

Before I resign myself into any one's hands I must know enough of him to make me feel that I am thus doing what is best. Let us just think what God is—all wise, all good, all loving, all able to make everything work together for the best; and then let us give self and all the interests of mind, body, and estate, up to Him, and humbly claim a sweet calm in return' It will not be denied. Our disturbances and distresses arise from ourselves, not from God and having yielded up 'self,' we shall be at rest. No change may have come over our circumstances, or over our pains, or disabilities, but one has come blessedly over our spirits, and we are at rest. We say with the poet (Philip Fred Hiller, A.D. 1699)—

*'Great Physician of the soul
Thou canst fear and pain control.
Is this sickness for me meet?
Lay me only at Thy feet;
I will live there on Thy grace,
Live to thank Thee and to praise.*

Chapter Eight

The Flower of Contentment

*‘Whatever Heaven hath sent,
With that am I content;
Whatever befall,
Pleasure or pain,
Or love or gain,
God is in all’
anon.*

There are some flowers which are very like others; indeed, until you look closely into them you cannot see the exact difference. And there are some graces also which are very like others, they all partake of something in common, yet they have their own distinctive features.

Contentment is one of the choice sick-bed flowers, it and Resignation grow very near each other; you cannot be resigned unless you be contented; if you are contented you will be resigned.

Discontent is too often an accompaniment of the sick bed, or sick estate. The condition of others is envied; our own is decried; we see everything

good in everyone else's estate— everything bad in our own. We see none of the evils others have to contend with, none of the good which blesses ourselves.

Discontent sours all the soil around it; and neither praise, nor love, nor peace, nor hope, nor gratitude, nor humility, nor indeed anything else that is good, will grow anywhere near it.

There is nothing which makes a sick or ailing man so thoroughly miserable himself, and which so brings discomfort to those around him too.

But when we find Content, it is a God-honouring grace. Surely when He comes and sees a smile on the pale lip, and hears words of contentment from the one who has many privations; when such gifts as He has bestowed are made much of; and such as He has not seen fit to give are not importuned for: when a man is satisfied with whatever his lot is—because it is God's lot for him—then God cannot but be pleased at this.

It is not necessary that a man should be blind to his own privations, or to the superior comforts of others, in order to procure Contentment. That contentment which honours God is what comes when a man is alive to both these. I am poor and he is rich, but I am content (which perhaps he is not); I am passed over, and he is promoted; I am weak, and he is strong; life is weary to me, it is cheery to him; but I am content Thus, according to their own experiences, may one and another of the children of God speak; and God hears their heart talkings—He walks in His garden, and rejoices in this flower.

And this is a flower that we all can grow. However poor our talents, this is within our reach. And we are sure to have opportunities of growing it. Everyone is tempted more or less to discontent—the sick especially: and to put down discontent, and, as the Apostle says, to *'be content with such*

things as we have,' and because these are what God gives us; and with what we have not, because these He withholds from us, is very acceptable to Him.

Contentment goes a little farther than Resignation—it has more in it that is positive. It is, if one might so speak, a very in-grown flower. We have not to go outside ourselves to find the elements of its growth.

Not but that we may find plenty in the world outside, as well as in our own thoughts, to help on Contentment. What multitudes there are who have not so much as we—not the alleviations which we possess! how many comforts we have, small enough in themselves, but very precious and useful to us, concerning any one of which, if they were taken away, we should say, *'Oh! if only I had such and such back again I should be content.'* Let us recognise them now, and be content. We may be sure our lot has in it some—yes, many elements of good. *'There is scarce any lot so low,'* says Sterne, *'but there is something in it to satisfy the man whom it has befallen; Providence having so ordered things that in every man's cup, how bitter soever, there are some cordial drops, some good circumstances, which, if wisely extracted, are sufficient for the purpose he wants them, i.e., to make him contented, and if not happy, at least resigned.'*

It is very profitable to ourselves to grow this plant upon our sick-beds.

Where it grows, all those carking thoughts of our having deserved better things, and not having got according to our deserts, are put down. This class of thought embitters life. It brings in with it a legion of disagreeable and wicked things, but Contentment will put them down if they come in; in general, will keep them from coming in at all. If I am satisfied, I do not trouble myself about how much more I might have had, or ought to have

had, I am at peace. I may not have much; but to me what I have is green pasture, and still water.

And where this plant is growing, there is belief that God is right. The hindrances to this blessed faith are removed. We view Him not through the disturbing element of our own agitated passions and feelings, but calmly, and wisely.

This little plant also enriches us. As the proverb says, '*The contented mind is a continuous feast.*' It makes all our present comfort ours; we have enough, without wandering after something which we may never be able to get at, without repining after anything gone, which experience shows we can do very well without. Having food and raiment we are therewith content; for with them we have God—and with God, we have all.

What we have is certainly all the more precious when we are content with it. Many an one has a garden, a house, a carriage; but they have no pleasure in these things, they are not content; they are nothing to them, they want something more. It has been well said, '*A tub was large enough for Diogenes, but a world was too little for Alexander.*' And oh, how many invitations and what frettings are spared us if we be contented in mind. '*Contentment,*' says Socrates, '*is natural wealth; luxury, artificial poverty.*' We may hear of this and that—very good things; but if we have Contentment we shall not trouble about them, any more than we do about possessing the thousands of things which we may see and admire in the shop windows. They are good in themselves, but we want them not.

Surely God will be pleased with the man who is well content with all He does—who in the full belief of His goodness is satisfied to give up all his own will; who dwells in peace within the narrow bounds which a Providence he cannot understand has appointed to him.

We can well believe that the Lord will come to our sick estate, whether of the bed or otherwise, and look to see if He can find this flower there. And if He do, He will appreciate it, He will honour it He will consider it garden-growth, and though the world knows nothing about it, and would not care for it, even if it did, He who has the appreciating eye for all true beauty will graciously consider it of great price. We shall have learned much, when we have attained to being able to say with the Apostle, that we have learned in whatever state we are, *'therewith to be content.'*

Chapter Nine

The Flower of Faith

*“So to God I leave it all;
Whatsoe'er may here befall,
Joy or toil, life or death,
I receive it all in faith;
And this anxious heart of mine
Learns to trust its Guide Divine,
Since it well hath understood
All things work the Christian's good.”*

spener.

We think a great deal of Faith in its activities in daily life. We call to mind its mighty works; for example, David's conflict with Goliath, and all those deeds of glory emblazoned in Hebrews xi. But while we think Resignation, and Contentment, and Patience, with their kindred graces, appropriate to the Sick-bed, we do not perhaps at first sight see how such a powerful and robust grace as Faith is needed in such a sphere, or can have scope for its development in such an unpretentious place.

But how can the Sick-bed be a Flower-bed at all, without Faith? For if that be absent, there must be distrust and complaining, and anxiety, and many other evils; all of which will so disturb the ground that nothing can be planted in it—whatever the Sick-bed may become, it can never be a Flower-bed of God.

No, the Sick-bed must be placed in its due position of honour. It must be acknowledged to be a great place, a precious plot, a sphere in which *great* things as well as beautiful ones can be produced.

Faith is simple trust—trust on God Himself, on God’s Word when He has promised, and on Himself when there is no promise.

And now, why should this Faith be so valuable in God’s sight, as to be considered worthy of being esteemed one of His precious flowers?

It is because it recognises God *Himself*. God wants us to know Himself. All His dealings with us are to bring us into communion and relationship with Himself, and everything that does that is precious. God wills us to know His complex character so far as we have faculties for doing so; He says, *‘I am truth, and wisdom, and goodness; and I value the Faith that, despite appearances, rests upon me as true, and wise, and good.’*

Sometimes the circumstances of the Sick-bed are apparently against our believing that God is all these. We hear a voice whispering to us and saying, *‘How can God be wise and good when He leaves you there to suffer?’* but this Faith says, *‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,’* and that is God-honouring indeed.

Yes! the Faith that goes back to Him alone—which will allow no bad surmise to have place in the heart about Him—which refuses to judge simply by appearances—which goes deeper than the seeing of the eye, and

the hearing of the ear—which honours God—that is a flower of His. God sees that He, not circumstances, is the object of the heart's rest and peace.

And so the old Eden tie is restored—the simple, direct, unquestioning life with God; and the Sick-bed whereon this life of union is led, must be precious in the sight of God.

Thus, without going any farther, we can see how, and why, God makes much of that with which we glorify His name. Let us not despise the Sick-bed or sick estate where all this is done. Let us not court large spheres of action for Faith; if we can do all that this one gives scope for, we shall be great indeed among the heroes of Faith.

As to this flower of Faith, it is, perhaps, the very simplest in the garden of the Lord. Its power is in its simplicity. It is nothing unless it be uncompounded. It is within reach of the simplest folk. It does not require a man to understand much; it is simple rest on God. And this is, perhaps, necessary, because of the great things which are expected of it. Points come to an issue with it very often in a blunt kind of way. On several occasions while writing these pages, I have either been told something exactly illustrating the matter in hand, or I have received some letters doing so.

Thus is it, while I am on this point before us now. A Christian friend, engaged in a very extensive benevolent work, involving a very large outlay, has just been telling me her experiences; and how the Lord has invariably responded to the trust reposed in Him. I shall select from what she has told me an interesting fact, which bears upon this point now before us, of Faith's being equal to an emergency, and being honoured in its exercise.

At half-past eight o'clock on a Saturday night there came twelve persons to the Convalescent Home which this lady managed. Whether by mistake or otherwise, I cannot say, but there they were and what was to be done with

them? It was too late to go out and get what was wanted, the matron and my friend were at their wit's end.

But it was only for a short time. This lady forthwith determined to lay the case before the Lord—sure that He would provide. And if God were to interfere it must be at once, for it was already dark.

Nothing doubting, but strong in faith, my friend went upstairs and spread the matter before the Lord, just as Hezekiah spread the letter of old. Then she went downstairs again, to see what the Lord would do.

It was almost dark in the hall, but still light enough to show this lady that there was now lying there a large bundle, which had not been there when she went up.

She called the matron to open it; and it was found to contain twelve pairs of sheets and twelve good blankets—the exact number required for the present emergency. While the offerer of prayer was asking, the answerer of prayer was sending.

And the way in which these blankets and sheets came at all—and how they came at this particular time, was (looking at the matter from its earthly side) thus:—

A lady, who had been interested in the collections made at the time of the Crimean war, had these blankets and sheets given to her, as a portion of surplus stores, for distribution; and a week before the time of which I am writing, she had forwarded them to this Home. They had been delayed by the railway in transmission, and had thus come to hand exactly at the moment they were wanted.

No doubt people who do not believe in God's providences, and in His answerings of prayer, will say, '*a very remarkable coincidence!*' I say the same. The difference between us is this; they believe in coincidences

coming all by themselves. I believe in their being arranged by God. Let them explain such experiences as they will, I doubt not this one which has come to hand so opportunely at the present moment will be of value to the reader, and be a helper to his Faith.

Do we believe? then, if so, we are to shut up all questionings, to hear no arguings—the thing is settled. ***‘It is the Lord,’*** that is enough,— ***‘Let Him do as seemeth good in His eyes.’***

Faith is indeed a strong-stemmed flower. It has no bending about it; no hanging down of the head; its nature is to stand up stiff and straight, not to bow to the storm, but to defy it. Any bending in it is generally a sign of imperfection, and feebleness, and unhealthiness.

There is no flower which has to be grown so independently of circumstances. Indeed, it is of the very essence of its nature not to take account of circumstances at all. If it leans on circumstances, it ceases to be Faith.

But this independence is only as regards what appears above ground. Faith has roots, and hidden resources for those roots. It has struck into the character and being of God Himself; it is a God-nourished plant.

And so, dear reader, you can grow it. Possibly you have many circumstances against you; all sick people have more or less: but never mind that; you have the same Spirit to help you who has helped millions besides you; you may grow *direct from God, for God*.

If you cultivate Faith, it will do much for you; it will make you yourself very rich. As we have already said, the grower of sick-bed flowers has the enjoyment of them himself. The riches of the Master’s character assures us this.

Sick-bed Faith will bring great peace. I knew an excellent minister of God who met with a terrible accident. For a long time he lay between life and death, but life triumphed at last. And that, not by the skill of nurses and surgeons alone, but by the restfulness of his own spirit; his calm peace as to whether he lived or died, his rest on God in faith keeping down fever and the disquiet of the nervous system, which would have been the weights to turn the scale in which his life hung.

Great peace on the sick-bed belongs to Faith.

And great leisure of heart. A whole host of speculations, questions, surmisings, and so forth, are all put to flight by Faith. If these had been in the heart, it must have been very busy about them; but Faith leaves them with God, and we need not meddle with them ourselves.

Faith is also the great giver of independence of heart—not that proud independence which would make a man refuse to be beholden to another for any kindness or comfort. I do not believe in that surly and churlish kind of independence at all. The proper spirit is, to be beholden to anybody for anything. Take things as they are meant; if God puts it into the heart of anyone to be kind to you in the least thing, accept it; and look upon the one who shows you the kindness as God's messenger to you.

But there is a glorious independence,—a being free from bondage to every little thing as our source of comfort, or provision, or peace— a knowledge that in all our trial we have to do with God Himself, and that we need not look to the breath of man for everything we want. God will make man His instrument; but when unbelief would say, *'Who will show us any good,'* our heart will answer, *'Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.'*— Yes! and we shall go on to say still more—even

what the Psalmist said, *'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.'*

The man of Faith is not the creature of circumstances; he does not belong to circumstances, but they to him—all things are his; and circumstances amongst the rest.

And the man who grows this flower for God is never friendless, never entirely lonely. He believes that God is in communion with him, and that he is in communion with God; he sees Him where others cannot see anyone; he hears a voice when others cannot hear anything. God is in His garden, and the flower of Faith is precious both to Him that owns it, and him that grows it.

Faith is content not to know the *'why'* of illness, and suffering, and pain, and all that they bring — the apparent failure in one's destiny, the non-productiveness of the powers which we perhaps feel we have. It accepts the mystery; it leaves it a mystery; it does not try to solve it, nor pine to have it solved—its strength is to sit still.

It believes in right ordering—it says, *'He hath done all things well.'*

It believes in the existence of a God, though unseen.

It leaves the issue of all things. It leaves to-morrow to itself—*'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'* It wants to know nothing about it

It believes in right orderings. It says, *'All is well;'* and moreover, *'all will be well to the end.'*

And God, looking upon all this, is well pleased; and His name is honoured; and the end and mission of His dispensation is all fulfilled.

Henceforth, then, let those who belong to the sick estate, and who have read these lines, not consider their condition as one unfruitful before God, or amongst men. Let them not look upon themselves as castaways upon

some barren island, where they are cut off from all intercourse, all usefulness; with no prospect better than just spinning out their lives until death ends the scene.

No, the Sick ones are in *their* place in the kingdom of God, on the great Proprietor's great estate. They are not, it may be, the foresters who have to do with mighty trees, or the quarry-men who blast and hew the marble rock, or the doer of any of the heavy work which makes a noise in the world; but they are the growers of tender and beautiful things, the Lord's garden men, the cultivators of the little plot which He has assigned to them, with directions to make the most of it for Him—they, with the help of the Holy Spirit, make the desert to blossom as the rose, and the Sick-beds of the Saints to be the Flower-beds of God.

The End

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