

WE GLORY IN STRENGTH



True patience, Biblical patience, is energy, buoyancy. It is strength—a strength more than earthly in origin.

It is *endurance*.

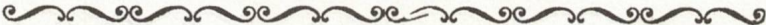
True patience is a mystery. Only the initiated can understand it. Only in faith can we attain to it.

Consider how two men accept inescapable suffering. One fears the pain and eagerly avails himself of the anesthetic which will make him insensible to the cutting knife. He does not want to suffer. He submits, but refuses to feel the pain. The other wants to know what is going on. Though the pain will be severe, he steels himself to bear it; he remains keenly sensitive to the knife, and endures the pain without complaint or moan. His is not mere submission. It is endurance.

Endurance is an exercise of heroic strength.

Have you experienced this higher strength, the strength of Christian patience?

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



III

For Love of God

HAVE you exhorted the sick and suffering to be patient and calm? Have you comforted them with talk of resignation, of submission to the will of God? Or praised them for bearing their cross without complaint?

Perhaps so. For such seems to be the accepted and common words of those who seek to comfort, uttered most earnestly by the sincere child of God as well as by those who have drifted from Him.

Yet such comfort is not in accordance with the spirit of God's Word.

In His Word we do not read of "resignation" or "submission," or of reconciling oneself to one's lot.

Such ideas come from the Stoics of ancient Greece and from the fatalistic Mohammedan's creed.

One who suffers without complaint may do so for the sake of the *world*, or for love of *self*, or for love of *God*. And only the last is true patience.

A soldier may be spurred to bravery by thirst for gain or honor. Pride and self-love may give him strength to bear hardship and pain without a murmur. Thus he may triumph over his suffering—triumph without faith in God, perhaps even while mocking at God and religion.

The stoics of ancient Greece and the fatalistic Mohammedans have their counterpart among us, even among us Chris-

FOR LOVE OF GOD



tians. There are men who control themselves with rigid discipline, as if they were above suffering and sorrow. They pride themselves on being strong characters. They are ashamed to give way to grief or even to show any emotion. In secret they may occasionally writhe in pain or despair; in the presence of others never.

But their strength is not in God. It is in self, in their own enthroned ego.

There are others, among the common run of folk, who submit to suffering as inevitable. It is the will of God, they say. And they confuse the scriptural doctrine of predestination with fatalism. It would be useless to protest or murmur. They resign themselves to trouble as a prisoner resigns himself to the narrow confines of his cell. They swallow their resentment. They sigh apathetically.

Thus men deaden themselves to feeling. They deaden themselves to love and beauty as well as to suffering. They kill within themselves the capacity to suffer, and they crush the heart's craving for the lost happiness of Paradise. When the storms of life beat upon them and the waves of trouble wash over their heads, they shut their eyes and stop their ears—they choose rather to sink to near oblivion than to suffer. By living less, they suffer less.

Men who deny the Christ can thus make a show of noble strength without dependence upon the Source of all strength. In their show of noble courage they ignore Him who sends the suffering. They bear it in the strength of their own pride, hardening their hearts, stifling all feeling.

And then man says, in his pride, that one can overcome sorrow without the Man of Sorrows, and one can triumph over death without the help of Him who conquered death.

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



Then they tell of the sick, how quiet and resigned they are upon their beds, though godless; how calmly and peacefully they die! They tell it tauntingly, because we still dare to confess that there is no peace apart from God!

And we who confess that great truth are to blame for this taunt of the godless. Because we, with the Word of God in our very homes, have helped to dim the light which Jesus shed upon the mystery of suffering. We have slipped back into the attitude of the ignorant heathen. We, too, enthrone proud self-control. And then we imagine that we are thus honoring God! It may even be that we label a deathbed "Christian" when it has no other virtue than that of stoical resignation to the inevitable. In so doing, we make it possible for the non-Christian to say, "We too can die thus; we can die thus *without* the Christ!"

Indeed they can die thus, and live thus too—calm, patient, submissive. Like the bones of Ezekiel's valley of the dead. But that is not *life*. That is not the life that throbs within you if you are one of those upon whom Christ has breathed life, if you are rejoicing in life from the dead! It is not being sensitive, as was tender Jesus.

The mystery of Christian suffering is not a dulling of sensitivity, nor a shrinking from pain, nor a wearing of complete armor about the flesh and heart so that no arrow can penetrate and no sword can pierce the inner recesses. But for Jesus' sake the Christian is willing to suffer, willing even to bear the added burden which will be his because he confesses Christ, knowing that just because he is a child of God he must endure the chastisement of a Father.

The Christian does not invite suffering. Neither does he struggle through it tearlessly when it comes. He pleads that

FOR LOVE OF GOD



it may be shortened; but in the midst of suffering he rises above his distress with a holy joy and a psalm of praise.

How is this possible?

The apostle says that though you give your body to be burned and have not love, your suffering would be in vain.

Only the glowing warmth of love can fuse intense suffering and exalted joy into a song of praise unto God.

The question then is this: Do you suffer *for love of God*? Suffer so, that you are drawn nearer to Him? Becoming even more His, and He yours? Are you, as it were, tearing your way through the thorns and thistles of life toward the gate of the Kingdom to meet Him, your God?

Such love does not originate within us.

“Love is of God.” It is shed forth into our hearts only through the Holy Spirit whom He has sent.