

panies us to the grave, and the cross casts its shadow across our path to the end. For this is the glory of faith, that it discloses another, a better way to us, a way on the heights of the mountain of God's holiness, which excels the ways of our earthly life, and dissolves all our sorrow, misery and affliction of soul in an higher vision. This way of faith passes not under the cloud which prevents the sun from shining on our path. He who travels this path has the clouds under him, and enjoys the free shining of the sun of grace. And then whether things in life succeed or fail, whether the struggle must be begun anew, or whether at last the struggle against what the world calls fate, is too much for him—in pleasure and distress, in sorrow and in joy, in prosperity and in adversity—the soul maintains its equipoise, the heart remains strong and fixed, and glorying in faith he says: Whatever be my lot, my foot standeth in an even place, which through faith, God has disclosed to me.

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“AN ABUNDANT REFRESHING.”

Life in the world above bears an entirely different aspect from life on earth. In the realm of glory is no sin, and consequently no redemption; no misery and therefore no deliverance. Neither can there be the transition from doubt to faith, from weakness to strength, from grief to comfort. In brief, all that by sin and misery brings constant changes, disturbance, transition, restoration and higher exaltation in our life on earth, is excluded from the life eternal.

This process of continuous change was foreign

to life in Paradise, and when sin came in, Paradise was gone, and the curse overtook our earthly existence. Not as though deadly monotony prevailed in Paradise, or that in heaven the absence of all change about God's throne would occasion a somber pall to darken the life of the blessed. Without endless distinction no higher life is thinkable, and that richer unfolding of life before the throne of God shall once exceed and excel everything that we have known as higher development of life on earth or have dreamed of in poetic fancy.

But life in the hereafter can not be measured by the standards of this life. It is of a different sort. It bears a different character. It obeys a different law. It interests and charms the senses by an entirely different beauty, wealth and enjoyment. On this very account it always is to be an object of faith and hope, and does not lend itself to forecasting in this life. And though Scripture may employ images from the earthly by which to convey to us an impression of the heavenly, everyone feels that the fat full of marrow and unmixed wine of the marriage-feast of the Lamb serve exclusively to waken the sensation of festal joy, and are by no means intended to indicate wherein this heavenly delight shall consist. It hath not yet been revealed what we shall be. It is enough for us to know that it will be a life in endless joy and glory. But how this joy shall once disclose itself to us, and in what form it will present itself, faith leaves with God. And all that the souls of God's children can desire, in expectation of this glory, centers itself in the Father who is in heaven and his son Jesus Christ.

Here on earth sin characterizes all of life. It does this by no means merely in the sense, that sin is continuously committed night and day, and that sin occasions ruin, but rather in this sense that sin breaks human life, constantly removes its supports and makes them change, and makes the way of life not straight, but restlessly to go up and down; now through deep places, again across heights, now through light, then through darkness; now marked by laughter, then by the weeping of those who mourn. That there is pleasure and pain; joy and sorrow; that there is strength and health and again weakness and sickness; that there is birth and death; a carrying to baptism and a carrying out to the grave; that there is total exhaustion and revival of strength; that there is corruption of soul and conversion; that there is temptation and allurements after Christ; in brief, that all of life reaches upwards and breaks into endless antitheses, springs from the one all-dominant fact of sin.

When it is once fixed in the mind that without sin there would be no misery, no sickness and no death in the earth, that it is sin which imprints its stamp of rupture and of healing upon our entire earthly life, it is exceedingly interesting for once to picture human existence from the viewpoint of this rupture. Without sin there would be no judges to pass sentence, no physicians to heal the sick, no clergy to preach God's Word, no works of mercy, no church of God in the earth. It must not be inferred from this, of course, that this broken life which has burst into all sorts of differences and antitheses, is the real life. Life in holy harmony and unbroken unity stands infinitely

higher, and shall one day show itself to be our true, real human existence, even as it is this already for God's angels. But it does follow from this that our earthly life must be continuously tossed and shaken and move ever up and down; and that it becomes richer, more interesting and more significant in the measure in which we are exposed to stronger tossings, and the up and down movement of our existence assumes larger proportions. These tossings in life are unequal. With one they are far more serious and grievous than with another. There are those who are scarcely ever moved, and who in consequence know but little elevation of life. But there are others who are cast to the bottom of the deepest abyss of suffering, but who as a result can have most blessed walks on the mountains of God's holiness.

Of this latter class one is continually the speaker in the Psalms. This accounts on one hand for the calls from depths of misery and for the complaints that bands of death and hell strike terror to his soul, and on the other hand for the jubilant exultations on account of deliverance and redemption, which result in the grateful acknowledgment, that God has brought him into a very abundant refreshing (Ps. 66:12 Dutch version).

Refreshing means the renewal of strength. A fresh team before the wagon means one that comes from pasture in the fulness of strength. A fresh corps of troops means a battle array which had no part yet at the front but goes out in unimpaired vigor. So there is refreshing when you come out of a period of deadly weariness of soul, of utter loss of strength, of inner under-

mining, so that rejuvenated and renewed in strength of life you feel by the grace of God that you have been, as it were, given back to yourself, in order, as though nothing had ever been the matter with you, in full realization of Divine grace, with renewed courage to take up the battle of life again. This refreshing can bear a two-fold character. It can be a refreshing from spiritual fainting, but it can also be a refreshing from discouragement with your lot in life. You may have been near the valley of the shadow of death, and now you walk again in lovely sunlight, which illumines all of life. The feeling of oppression and distress which trouble, adversity, bereavement and suffering brings can weigh like a ton upon the heart, and almost crush it. Most people never learn what this means. They, too, drink their cup, but to most people by far this cup is not handed save by measure. They would have no greatness of soul to endure it. But there have always been a few, against whose breast the waves of the bitter lot beat restlessly and unsparingly and almost so pitilessly, that only their inborn heroic nature protected them by God's grace from fainting. Such a period can be long protracted, and the continuance of trouble and suffering is namelessly exhausting and fatiguing. But when finally there is a surcease, and sunny days arrive, and the oil of gladness is given for mourning, it frequently pleases the Lord to impart to such a sufferer of the Job-type such unknown joy of life that the song of praise rises from the soul: "O, my God, Thou hast brought me an abundant refreshing."

It is more quiet, but still more blessed when

this abundant refreshing overtakes us spiritually. Of course, this only overtakes him who exists spiritually, who inwardly leads a spiritual life and who can thirst after God as the hart thirsts after the water brooks. The many thousands who live in unconcern, without ever missing fellowship with God, stand entirely outside of this. But when you are aware of a spiritual life in the soul; when you know what it is to be initiated in the secret walk with God; when you have learned every morning and every evening to draw real strength from seeking and finding God; then life divides itself for you into two sharply contrasted sorts of days: days when rich in God, and living close to him, you feel the soul within you leap for joy; and other days, when the heavens seem like brass, and you are thrown back upon yourself, and nothing but darkness is perceived within, and like lost sheep you feel that you have wandered away from God. This may be the result of committed sin, but it can also be that God purposely leads you through darkness, to try your faith and to operate on you more deeply with unseen grace. So there may be days, and weeks, and sometimes months that God hides his face from you; that no star appears in the dark sky of the soul; and that, feeling yourself forsaken of God, you mourn within yourself with a sorrow which the world neither knows nor understands, but which cuts you sorely through the heart.

But this suffering is only for a time. In the forsakenness you were not forsaken, but God was operating on you with a grace, the fruit of which you would only recognize and enjoy later on. And when at length these days of spiritual dark-

ness are ended, and light shines forth again, and God returns to reveal himself to you in the fullness of his grace, then for you also there is abundant refreshing. And then you perceive and confess that had not God led you through this depth of forsakenness, you would never have experienced such deep joy in your soul, as now became your portion. Only after having led you through this depth of darkness, was God able to bring you out to such abundant refreshing.

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“FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.”

To go from strength to strength is to grow, to wax strong, to increase. It is not to remain what we are, and mostly retrograde. On the contrary it is to advance, to make progress, to become richer, fuller and more abundant in faith, in virtue of which to become richer in godliness and in fruits meet for repentance.

God shows this growth from strength to strength in plants. When the oak first starts to grow, it can be bent over with the hand, but when it obtains size and becomes a full-grown tree, it is able by its strength to resist the hurricane. The same is shown in animals. The young colt which at first is scarcely able to stand up becomes after a few years the strong horse, after whose power man estimates the power of steam, which laughs at the heavily laden wagon, and with rider in saddle leaps over wall and hedge.

But God shows this process more beautifully in our own child. First the helpless babe, which is fondled on the lap, and has to be carried on the arm. Then the struggle with the difficulties of