

THE PILGRIM'S CROSS & THE SAINTS' VICTORY, By W. CROKER,

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**"He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." —Matt.
x, 38.**

**"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."-1
Cor. xv, 57.**

The road of eternal life and glory, though marked out from eternity by everlasting love, and divinely paved with that mercy and goodness which follow the Lord's family all their days, is nevertheless a narrow path to walk in, and attended with continual discouragements. But the Lord's daily dispensations towards us are suited to wean us from every thing here, and to convince us that happiness is only to be found in the Lord. Our roses here grow on thorns, our honey contains a sting. Frequently our sharpest trials spring from our choicest earthly comforts. Perhaps while we are admiring our gourd a worm is secretly preying upon its root. While we are in this lower world, we shall find it a valley of tears, we shall experience that we are wandering in a wilderness, in a solitary way; we shall experience hunger and thirst, and no city to dwell in—no rest here—a way full of traps, and gins, and nets—a way full of doubts, and fears, and great misgivings of heart—a way full of trouble, where we shall feel various changes, through faintness of soul ready to halt, almost on the point of looking back, experiencing at times that there is but a step betwixt us and death. Sometimes we shall fear that the good work of grace is not begun, that we have no part in the matter, that we shall one day perish by the hand of this or the other enemy who are both secret and open persecutors of us. "But the triumph of the wicked is short." Perceiving nothing in ourselves, nothing but barrenness of soul, deadness of affection, no faith in exercise, our love grown cold, our hope withered like a tree, our strength exhausted,—we shall be ready to conclude that "the mercy of the Lord is clean gone for ever, and that he hath in wrath shut up his tender mercies." We also feel ourselves like the silly dove, without heart for any thing spiritual or divine ; when we attend the means of grace, we find little or no power of the gospel of Christ, no incomings of his grace, love, and spirit; no communing with God in prayer, but walk under the hidings of his countenance ; when we look within, and find nothing but a body of sin

and death, and Satan permitted to come in with his fiery temptations and awful suggestions, saying, " If you were one of his chosen ones, if God loved you, he would not leave you now you are in distress ; therefore you are none of his." And added to this, perhaps, they are the subjects of poverty, want, sickness, pain, and bereavement ; and in this state deserted by all, and befriended by none, dwelling alone like a sparrow upon the house top. "As many as I love—not as many as I hate, but love, I rebuke and chasten." The gardener takes but little notice of that tree he intends to cut down. He never manures, prunes, waters, or defends it; but he does all these things to his own plantation. "As the great Head of the Church, he is washing the feet of his disciples ; digging and purging his garden, pruning his trees, awaking the north wind, beating his spices, snuffing his candles, trimming his lamps, trying his gold, refining his silver, purging the dross, removing the rubbish, descending in a cloud, and stripping them of self-admiration, which is idolatry—and all this in covenant love. The Lord tries our faith, by stirring up every thing in opposition to us, yet enabling us to believe through all. He tries our love, by leading us to see the awful errors that abound in the world, in opposition to the most blessed Redeemer ; and by sometimes hiding his face. He tries our hope, by permitting Satan to assault us on every hand. He tries our patience, by delays to answer our prayers, by the length of our afflictions, and by their abounding. Thus he tries us, and then he most graciously gives us an opportunity of trying him. We try his love, and find it the same every hour. We try his power, and find it supports and cheers us. We try his word, and find it precious. We try his obedience, death, and intercession, and find it brings lasting peace to the soul. We try his truth and faithfulness, and find that firm all the way to heaven. We try his long suffering, by our daily provocations; and try his mercy and find it kind,—his* grace, and find it sovereign, rich and free. Thus the Lord deals with us, and we with him." " All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. Psalm xxv. 10.

The dealings of God with his own
To such as his covenant keep,
Are mercy; and mercy alone
Preserves them, awake or asleep.
There's mercy in bodily pain;
There's mercy in mental distress;
There's mercy when toss'd on the main,
And when they're becalm'd nothing less.
There's mercy when call'd to endure
Reproaches, for Jesu's dear name:

Sweet mercy preserves them secure,
And wipes away sorrow and shame.
There's mercy in every loss,
And mercy in every rod;
There's mercy in every cross;
And all from a covenant God!

The Lord's dear children are his workmanship, created in righteousness and true holiness, after the image of him that created them. They have the sacrifice of God, which is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart which God will not despise. They have the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. They have an evidence that they are justified in the righteousness of Christ imputed to and put upon them, so that like the king's daughter, they are all glorious within, and shall never come into condemnation. Their bodies being the temples of the Holy Ghost, they walk in love, as Christ has loved them, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God. Gospel principles will produce gospel fruits, and those who bring not forth these are sensual, having not the Spirit! Christ is a fountain to his chosen, and his constant and sufficient supplies of mercy, truth, and grace—his unceasing attention, watchful providence, and unalterable affection, prove to us he is a brother born for adversity, and one that loveth at all times. In him is an ocean of grace—a fountain of living waters—a perpetual spring. Here is water of life—a cordial for life—help for the needy—strength for the weak—victory for the oppressed—perseverance for the faint—who are yet journeying. The tear of sorrow he wipes away—the hungry soul he satisfies, and the mourner in Zion he comforts. It is he, and he alone, when death, darkness, and disease invade our souls, that causes us to come from under the stairs—that makes the inhabitants of the rock to sing, and the desert wilderness to blossom as the rose.

Grace is an ocean, deep and wide,
And mercy is a flowing stream;
I've seen it flowing from his side,
A guilty rebel to redeem.

The way which God has appointed to his kingdom, although it is through much tribulation, we must enter, it is a good way; the Holy Spirit breathes in that way, and invigorates those who are ready to faint; in that good way heavenly manna falls to satisfy the hungry, and angels minister to all who go therein. Believers have the omnipotence of God for their support, and the

favour of the Almighty for their shield. The Lord is their God, and in him they have an everlasting spring of consolation and an immortal inheritance. The word of God is an abstract of the divine mind, a map of the heavenly Canaan, the best companion of the Christian warrior, and a net in the hand of a real spiritual minister. The blessed word of God to heaven-born and heaven-bound pilgrims is bright as a constellation, glorious as the meridian sun, fruitful as the rain, healing as balm, true as Jehovah, and lasting as eternity. The gospel in the hand of the Spirit is a ministry of grace and righteousness, and its rich variety of blessings are suited to all our necessities ; it brings pardon to the guilty, peace for the troubled mind, strength for the weak, assurance for the wavering, and salvation to the lost. The Lord's ear is not only open to the prayers of the righteous, but his eye is upon their persons and circumstances; to observe what is best for them, and to answer their petitions accordingly. Whatever draws the soul near to God cannot be real adversity, and whatever allure it from God cannot be real prosperity. God sometimes corrects with outward afflictions, but at the same time smiles with inward manifestations; the latter sweeten and alleviate the former. There is no pill so bitter in this world, but the love of God can sweeten it. From Jesus Christ are derived all our supplies of grace. and in him are centered all our hopes of glory. The future inheritance of the saints is such, that to cross the breadth of it would take up much of eternity, and to go round its circumference will take up all eternity. The believer's soul is sometimes invaded by numerous enemies, and almost overwhelmed with accumulated sorrows; in such circumstances Jesus Christ is the grand object to which he must resort, as being the only source of solid peace and lasting comfort. "God had one Son without sin, says one, but none without sorrow." But what meaneth this cross upon the shoulders of the Son of God." It is a bed on which he slept in death. Golgotha was his chamber,—the thorns were his pillow, and the cross was his, bed. "He has left us an example that we must follow his steps."

The gate of the cross is the only way to the crown. As a poor servant of God, saved by grace, I would prefer the poor cloak of Paul, with the robe of Jesus on my soul, before the scarlet robes of kings with their kingdoms. It is a comforting truth, believer, your God is your's as much in the dark day of afflictive dispensation, as when your sky is filled with serenity and brightness. The day of suffering is not a period when his love diminishes ; no, for it remains in equal vigour, and burns with equal fervour. The night of your affliction may appear long; but may you be comforted with this, that the length as well as the kind of your affliction, is in conformity to the perfect arrangement of the wisdom and goodness of God. You shall be delivered at

the very time the gracious purpose of your heavenly Father has determined, no later and no sooner. It is comforting for you to know, that in your afflictions God is still your God. And whatever your path may be, may you be enabled to rely upon the arm of God in his word, take hold of it as your walking staff,—Psalm xxiii, 4,—safely to rest on, in passing through this dark valley of time: “praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,” for

Believers have a silent field to fight,
And their exploits are veiled from human sight;
They in some nook, where little known they dwell,
Kneel, pray in faith, and rout the hosts of hell.

If we expect to find perfect happiness in any terrestrial good, we shall certainly be mistaken. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” may be written on every thing we enjoy beneath the sun. Whatever exchange we make in this world, it is only one wilderness for another; so that our change of condition will not exempt us from trouble. This we may expect, it will only be an exchange of trials, and those sometimes for the worse; this, however, should not dishearten us. He that hath God's call need not to doubt of God's help. When the way is made plain, whatever trials meet us, we find comfort in the consciousness of being in God's way. He sometimes leads by a rugged but always by a right path. We should never expect a situation without its peculiar trials. I am sure I can say for myself, that I have so often been disappointed in this respect, that I cannot look for a situation on this side of the grave without being assailed by some particular trials. It is, however, no small comfort to me, and it will be so to others, if they get this truth rivetted on the mind, that all our trials are dealt out by weight and measure by the hand of our heavenly Father; so that we shall not have one grain more than weight, nor one inch more than measure. The whole course of our sublunary life does not afford us one single draught of joy without a mixture of wormwood in the cup. It is a chequered path the Lord generally leads his people through, from conversion to glorification. The real Christian is burdened and delivered, sighing and singing, on the mount of communion and in the shadow of death, loaded with corruption, and pardoned by blood, condemned and justified, happy and miserable, meeting a few real pilgrims and plenty of enemies fighting and fainting, rising and falling, yet kept sanctified and meet for glory ! Sometimes groaning under a body of death, then soaring with the wings of a dove; brought out of self and living by faith, on the person and love, the work and grace of Christ. That which makes the draught peculiarly nauseous is the consideration that our trials often come

from a quarter that we little anticipated. Where we expect the greatest comforts there we frequently meet with the greatest crosses. We should never judge of men by mere appearance: a red coat is not courage, nor is a black one religion. 'We may as well expect to find reason in a bat as to find spirituality in an unregenerate man, however high he may stand in the estimation of his fellow mortals in a profession. There is as vast a difference between the knowledge of God by the letter of his word, and the knowledge of God by the Spirit of his Son, as there is between a marble statue of an angel in Westminster Abbey and a living angel in the heaven above. As it respects God, may we be preserved from murmuring against him; watch his hand in every thing, and live under the force of this assertion, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Oh for a meek and quiet spirit! it is, in the sight of God, of great price, and to us will be great peace. Above every thing may we live near to God, yea, live in him, bear every trial in him, and regard him in every thing. Thus we shall pass safely through this vale of tears; and if not free from troubles, yet we shall enjoy God in them. I am sure I speak by experience, when I say, that great trials, if the Lord be in them, are better than great worldly comforts without him. I am certain that some day or other we shall thank him for them all. Here we are prone to err as in the first case. There we expected less trials than we met with, and here we often expect more enjoyment than we really find. We should remember that the cup of creature comfort is not very deep; we soon come to the bottom of it; and unless we enjoy the Almighty in it we soon exhaust it. We must remember that there is no creature comfort but what hath much mixture of nauseous ingredients in it ; and that which makes the sweets of life doubly sweet, is the enjoyment of God in them ; yea, I may say that the presence of God makes the bitter sweet, and the sweet trebly so. The Lord will sweeten the bitterness of life, strengthen us when weak, comfort us when sad, nourish us when sick, and help us forward in the ways of God. Happy will it be for us if we are thus favoured. The gracious God has tempered the bitterness of life with much sweetness, that taken altogether, it becomes bearable and sometimes palatable. If it were all bitter, we should get tired of life before we saw half of it; if it were all sweet, we should make a home of this life : therefore there is a happy mixture in the cup of providence, so that it is neither a state of bondage nor a bed of sloth. We may gather the honey of comfort from the bitterest flowers. " We rejoice in tribulation,—as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live ; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things."-

“There is a secret in the ways of God,

With his own children which none others know,
That sweetens all he does; and if such peace.
While under his afflicting hand we find,
What will it be to see him as he is,
And pass the reach of all that now disturb
The tranquil soul's repose; to contemplate,
In retrospect unclouded, all the means
By which his wisdom has prepared his saints
For the vast weight of glory which remains?
Come then affliction, if my Father bids,
And be my frowning friends: a friend that frowns
Is better than a smiling enemy! "

The misery that we are exposed to when left to ourselves is, that we sink into the creature instead of rising into the Creator; we look for that in the creature which is only to be found in God. But we may take this as an incontrovertible truth, that if anything is put in competition with God, it will be torn from us, though it be the darling idol of the heart; therefore if we wish to have our comforts continued, may we be enabled to keep them in their own place, enjoy God in them, and bless God for them, and like the church, keep the moon of creature comforts where it should be, under our feet. Rev. xii. As it respects creature comforts, expect them sparingly, use them subordinately, enjoy them thankfully, and resign them willingly, that we may with Job say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." God humbles those first with his frowns whom he intends to honour with his favours. Ah, it is easy to advise; but I find it hard indeed to bless the hand of God when that hand strikes my greatest comforts dead. It requires great grace; but no more than he hath given, and promised to give. May he help us to act as a people dependent on the hand of God. The children of God have some peculiar sorrows, they have sorrows of spirit; they have afflictions and oppressions of soul, to which the unregenerate are utter strangers. And yet I know with all these peculiar trials, the true believer has secret springs of joy and consolation, which men of the world know nothing of. He has in his darkest hour, a happiness which the ungodly experience not in the summit of their prosperity. Though he be an outcast in the wilderness, there is One who can turn him to the well of water ; though he have no human friend to sympathize with him, there is One who can say to him " What aileth thee ?" one who can lead him to a river, " the streams whereof make glad the people of God." The people of God are often at their wits' end; they know not where they are going; they know not why they are in the circumstances they feel themselves to be in; they know not either how they may get cut. So dark and

mysterious are the Lord's ways at times, that it may be said, "Thy way is in the sea." "What he does we may not know now, but we shall know hereafter." "The grace of life quickens us to feel our real wants, and gives us an appetite. The grace of faith emboldens us to pray. The grace of humility teaches us to submit our suit to the will of God,—the grace of hope expects an answer,—and the grace of patience waits till it comes." Has God led you a thorny way believer? Remember that the thorns of eternal justice pierced your Redeemer's brow, that they might only wound your feet. They shall not make your temples bleed; Christ has borne the curse. Walk on then, my companion in tribulation, in the path appointed you of the Lord, for all things work together for good, all things are your's, Christ your Redeemer has all things folded up in his wisdom, love and power. God has given you Christ ; and with him, nay, in him he has given you all things. All good is folded up in Jesus, and he is made over to you for ever. The Lord Jesus will preserve us in all circumstances, through all trials, in all crosses, and through all snares and temptations, and foes and evils that beset our path through this evil world. However the believer, in the exercise of faith, may look beyond the present scenes,—however he may leap over, in his mind, the dreary interval of sin and sorrow,—however having cast anchor within the veil, he may anticipate those glorious scenes of bliss, which are prepared for the people of God,—still must he feel the evils of this present time,—still must he groan within himself,—he must feel that "no temptation for the present is joyous, but grievous." Yet in all this wilderness of woe, he has the pillar by night and day, he has the manna to satisfy his hunger, and the water from the rock. Christ,—the overflowing spring,—a rich supply for his thirsty soul. The believer must lay it out for himself to "suffer in this present time;" the Lord indeed will sanctify the path of his sufferings, as he has done by treading it himself: he will indeed cheer and support his soul in this dark vale of tears. Very often we are constrained to acknowledge that there are very many sufferings in this present time; not to mention the snares that beset our path, and the many wiles and deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are sufferings, we feel them to be so, but they are present sufferings, they shall soon pass away; our sorrows here shall soon be passed; days and years are quickly rolling; and when, fleeting down the current of time, they shall have discharged themselves into the interminable ocean of eternity, then we shall find

"All our sorrows left below,
And earth exchanged for heaven."

O believer, thou halt great cause for thankfulness amidst all thy sorrows. Think of the providence of your God; of his forbearance, how he has healed

your wounds, how he has guided you, how he has consoled you, and how he has held you up; then sit down and cast up the account; you can easily find a scale to contain your cases and sorrows, but where is the earthly scale that can contain infinitude ? No, the least of all his mercies would weigh down the beam if a scale could be found. Let the believer remember for his comfort, that the peace of God will soften his dying pillow, smile around his bed, and escort him to the paradise of immortal glory! The poor, afflicted, broken spirit, which now breathes in trouble as in its daily air, and scarcely knows any other rule for computing the periods of time than by the revolutions of sorrows and disappointments shall then be tuned to the high praises of God; and its love to him who is the Lord of love, shall feel no bounds and fear no end. Oh! How the unveiled glory of God will then brighten many a face which is now darkened with grief, and stained with tears, and daily wears the hue of melancholy. There is not a sorrowful countenance in all the courts of Zion's King that knows him, but their doubts and fears have dropped off with the veil of mortality, and sorrow and sighing have fled far away! Lift up your heads, then, ye that travel towards the heavenly Zion, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. It is not more certain that the sun doth shine in the firmament, than that ye shall live for ever in the heavenly Jerusalem, and join the innumerable company about the throne, in the everlasting praise of your God and Redeemer. The safety of your reaching home is in the hands of the eternal God; his life holds thy life; thou livest in him, thou shalt die in him, "I have loved thee." The eternity of God's love is the circle he moves in towards thee; God cannot get out of it, and thou who art in this circle cannot get out either; it is as impossible for thee to get out, as it is for God himself. In this revolving circle, thou art from eternity to eternity enfolded, and thy orbit in time is within it, and cannot be separated for ever. Possessing true and living faith in Christ, all thou hast to do, through the influence of the Holy Ghost, is, with calmness to lay thy dying head on a Saviour's bosom, of God's love, God's covenant, and God's faithfulness. An unchanging God shall be thy security. The love of the Father, the blood of the Son, the communion of the Holy Ghost, is the centre place of faith. Thy dwelling place must be here, for safety at last, in the solid shining perfections of Jehovah; and dying here, thou shalt gain thy all, the summit of thy happiness, and the perpetuity of thy bliss. It was the prospect of this bliss that led Paul to say, "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better." The word depart, applied to death, seems, according to some, to be an idea taken from a vessel at a foreign port. Having accomplished the end of her voyage, and taken in all her lading, she weighs her anchor, and leaves the distant climes, in hopes of soon arriving at her native shores, See her sails expanded, the winds favourable, and the sea

placid. Under the protection of a strong convoy she ploughs the fluid element, and speeds her course to the desired haven. Immortal spirit, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, possessed of a plenitude of divine love, what hast thou to do any more in these regions of sorrow ? Heaven is thy native place, thy portion, thy felicity, and thy final home. Death has loosed thee as from a prison. Thou hast embarked for Immanuel's land. Happy soul ! thou hast weathered the storm, thou hast braved the seas, and now thou hast safely arrived in thine own country. We, thy late companions in tribulation, are speeding our way, with eager desires, upon the wings of time and hope, ere long to be happy with thee to all eternity.

Amen. Hallelujah!

So, bound and fettered to her cell of clay,
Th' impatient spirit longs to burst away;
Scorns the vain world for nobler realms above,
And burns to dwell in everlasting love.

In those blest regions of eternal day,
No painful thorns obstruct the heavenly way;
No earthly vapours dim the expanding sight
From the pure blaze of uncreated light.

No grief is there, no tears of sorrow flow,
No bitter memory of a world of woe;
No ills, no wrongs, immortal joys molest,
The wicked harm not, and the weary rest.

Oh, might we bid a last adieu to earth,
And fly exulting to celestial birth;
Burst the weak bars that hold us prisoners here,
And view the glories of the heavenly sphere.

Then wrapt in visions of celestial joy,
Where endless praises every tongue employ,
Our ransomed souls absorbed in sacred bliss,
Shall see the great Redeemer as he is.

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