

F.B. Meyer:

YOU ARE PASSING THROUGH a time of deep sorrow. The love on which you were trusting has suddenly failed you, and dried up like a brook in the desert now a dwindling stream, then shallow pools, and at last drought. You are always listening for footsteps that do not come, waiting for a word that is not spoken, pining for a reply that carries overdue.

Perhaps the savings of your life have suddenly disappeared. Instead of helping others, you must be helped; or you must leave the warm nest where you have been sheltered from life's storms to go alone into an unfriendly world; or you are suddenly called to assume the burden of some other life, taking no rest for yourself till you have steered it through dark and difficult seas into the haven. Your health, or sight, or nervous energy is failing; you carry in yourself the sentence of death; and the anguish of anticipating the future is almost unbearable. In other cases there is the sense of recent loss through death, like the gap in the forest, where the woodsman has lately been felling trees.

At such times life seems almost unsupportable. Will every day be as long as this? Will the slow-moving hours ever again quicken their pace? Will life ever array itself in another garb than the torn autumn remnants of past summer glory? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (Ps. 77:9).

This road has been trodden by myriads.--When you think of the desolating wars which have swept through every country and devastated every land; of the expeditions of the Nimrods, the Nebuchadnezzars, the Timours, the Napoleons of history; of the merciless slave trade; and of all the tyranny, the oppression, the wrong which the weak and defenseless have suffered at the hands of their fellows; of the unutterable sorrows of women and children--surely you must see that by far the larger number of our race have passed through the same bitter griefs as those which rend your heart.

Jesus Christ Himself trod this difficult path, leaving traces of His blood on its flints; and apostles, prophets, confessors, and martyrs have passed by the same way. It is comforting to know that others have traversed the same dark valley, and that the great multitudes which stand before the Lamb, wearing palms of victory, came out of great tribulation. Where they were we are; and, by God's grace, where they are we shall be.

Do not talk about punishment.-You may talk of chastisement or correction, for our Father deals with us as with sons; or you may speak of reaping the results of mistakes and sins dropped as seeds into life's furrows in former years; or you may have to bear the consequences of the sins and mistakes of others; but do not speak of punishment. Surely all the guilt and penalty of sin were laid on Jesus, and He put them away forever. His were the stripes and the chastisement of our peace. If God punishes us for our sins, it would seem that the sufferings of Christ were incomplete; and if He once began to punish us, life would be too short for the infliction of all that we deserve. Besides, how could we explain the anomalies of life, and the heavy sufferings of the saints as compared with the gay life of the ungodly? Surely, if our sufferings were penal, there would be a reversal of these lots.

Sorrow is a refiner's crucible.-It may be caused by the neglect or cruelty of another, by circumstances over which the sufferer has no control, or as the direct result of some dark hour in the long past; but inasmuch as God has permitted it to come, it must be accepted as His appointment, and considered as the furnace by which He is searching, testing, probing, and purifying the soul. Suffering searches us as fire does metals. We think we are fully for God, until we are exposed to the cleansing fire of pain. Then we discover, as Job did, how much dross there is in us, and how little real patience, resignation, and faith. Nothing so detaches us from the things of this world, the life of sense, the birdlime of earthly affections. There is probably no other way by which the power of the self-life can be arrested, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

But God always keeps the discipline of sorrow in His own hands.-Our Lord said, "My Father is the husbandman." His hand holds the pruning-knife. His eye watches the crucible. His gentle touch is on the pulse while the operation is in progress. He will not allow even the devil to have his own way with us. As in the case of Job, so always. The moments are carefully allotted. The severity of the test is exactly determined by the

reserves of grace and strength which are lying unrecognized within, but will be sought for and used beneath the severe pressure of pain. He holds the winds in His fist, and the waters in the hollow of His hand. He dares not risk the loss of that which has cost Him the blood of His Son. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able" (1 Cor. 10:13) .

In sorrow the Comforter is near. Very present in time of trouble. He sits by the crucible, as a Refiner of silver, regulating the heat, marking every change, waiting patiently for the scum to float away, and His own face to be mirrored in clear, translucent metal. No earthly friend may tread the winepress with you, but the Saviour is there, His garments stained with the blood of the grapes of your sorrow. Dare to repeat it often, though you do not feel it, and though Satan insists that God has left you, "Thou art with me." Mention His name again and again, "Jesus, Jesus, Thou art with me." So you will become conscious that He is there.

When friends come to console you they talk of time's healing touch, as though the best balm for sorrow were to forget; or in their well-meant kindness they suggest travel, diversion, amusement, and show their inability to appreciate the black night that hangs over your soul. So you turn from them sick at heart, and prepared to say, as Job, "Miserable comforters are ye all." But all the while Jesus is nearer than they are, understanding how they wear you, knowing each throb of pain, touched by fellow feeling, silent in a love too full to speak, waiting to comfort from hour to hour as a mother her weary and suffering babe.

Be sure to study the art of this Divine comfort, that you may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction with the comfort with which you yourself have been comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:4) . There can be no doubt that some trials are permitted to come to us, as to our Lord, for no other reason than that by means of them we should become able to give sympathy and succor to others. And we should watch with all care each symptom of the pain, and each prescription of the Great Physician, since in all probability at some future time we shall be called to minister to those passing through similar experiences. Thus we learn by the things which we suffer, and, being made perfect, become authors of priceless and eternal help to souls in agony.

Do not shut yourself up with your sorrow.-A friend, in the first anguish of bereavement, wrote, saying that he must give up the Christian ministries in which he had delighted; and I replied immediately, urging him not to do so, because there is no solace for heart-pain like ministry. The temptation of great suffering is toward isolation, withdrawal from the life of men, sitting alone, and keeping silence. Do not yield to it. Break through the icy chains of reserve, if they have already gathered. Arise, anoint your head and wash your face; go forth to your duty, with willing though chastened steps.

Selfishness of every kind, in its activities or its introspection, is a hurtful thing, and shuts out the help and love of God. Sorrow is apt to be selfish. The soul, occupied with its own griefs, and refusing to be comforted. becomes presently a Dead Sea, full of brine and salt, over which the birds do not fly, and beside which no green thing grows. And thus we miss the very lesson that God would teach us. His constant war is against the self-life, and every pain He inflicts is to lessen its hold upon us. But we may thwart His purpose and extract poison from His gifts, as men get opium and alcohol from innocent plants.

A Hindu woman, the beautiful Eastern legend tells us, lost her only child. Wild with grief, she implored a prophet to give back her little one to her love. He looked at her for a long while tenderly, and said:

"Go, my daughter, bring me a handful of rice from a house into which Death has never entered, and I will do as thou desirest."

The woman at once began her search. She went from dwelling to dwelling, and had no difficulty in obtaining the rice the prophet specified; but when they had granted it, she inquired:

"Are you all here around the hearth-father. mother, children-none missing?"

The people invariably shook their heads, with sighs and looks of sadness. Far and wide as she wandered, there

was always some vacant seat by the hearth. And gradually, as she passed on, the legend says, the waves of her grief subsided before the spectacle of sorrow everywhere; and her heart ceased to be occupied with its own selfish pang, flowing out in strong yearnings of sympathy with the universal suffering. Tears of anguish softened into tears of pity, passion melted away in compassion, she forgot herself in the general interest, and found redemption in redeeming.

Do not chide yourself for feeling strongly.-Tears are natural. Jesus wept. A thunderstorm without rain is fraught with peril; the pattering raindrops cool the air and relieve the overcharged atmosphere. The swollen brooks indicate that the snows are melting on the hills and spring is near. "Daughters of Jerusalem," said our Lord, "weep for yourselves and your children."

To bear sorrow with dry eyes and stolid heart may befit a Stoic, but not a Christian. We have no need to rebuke fond nature crying for its mate, its lost joy, the touch of the vanished hand, the sound of the voice that is still, provided only that the will is resigned. This is the one consideration for those who suffer-is the will right? If it isn't, God Himself cannot comfort. If it is, then the path will inevitably lead from the valley of the shadow of death to the banqueting table and the overflowing cup.

Many say: "I can not feel resigned. It is bad enough to have my grief to bear, but I have this added trouble, that I can not feel resigned."

My invariable reply is: "You probably never can feel resignation, but you can will it."

The Lord Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, has shown us how to suffer. He chose His Father's will. Though Judas, prompted by Satan, was the instrument for mixing the cup and placing it to the Saviour's lips, He looked right beyond him to the Father, who permitted him to work his cruel way, and said: "The cup that My Father giveth Me to drink, shall I not drink it?" And He said repeatedly, "If this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." He gave up His own way and will, saying, "I will Thy will, O My Father. Thy will, and not Mine, be done."

Let all sufferers who read these lines go apart and dare to say the same words: "Thy will, and not mine. Thy will be done in the earth of my life, as in the heaven of Thy purpose. I choose Thy will." Say this thoughtfully and deliberately, not because you can feel it, but because you will it; not because the way of the cross is pleasant, but because it must be right. Say it repeatedly, whenever the surge of pain sweeps through you, whenever the wound begins to bleed afresh. "Not my will, but Thine be done." Dare to say Yes to God. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

And so you will be led to feel that all is right and well. A great calm will settle down on your heart, a peace that passeth understanding, a sense of rest, which is not inconsistent with suffering, but walks in the midst of it as the three young men in the fiery furnace, to whom the burning coals must have been like the dewy grass of a forest glade.

"The doctor told us my little child was dying. I felt like a stone. But in a moment I seemed to give up my hold on her. She appeared no longer mine, but God's."

Be sure to learn God's lessons.-Each sorrow carries at its heart a germ of holy truth, which if you get and sow in the soil of your heart will bear harvests of fruit, as seed-corns from mummy-cases bear fruit in modern soil. God has a meaning in each blow of His chisel, each incision of His knife. He knows the way that He takes. But His object is not always clear to us.

In suffering and sorrow God touches the minor chords, develops the passive virtues, and opens to view the treasures of darkness, the constellations of promise, the rainbow of hope, the silver light of the covenant. What is character without sympathy, submission, patience, trust, and hope that grips the unseen as an anchor? But

these graces are only possible through sorrow. Sorrow is a garden, the trees of which are laden with the peaceable fruits of righteousness; do not leave it without bringing them with you. Sorrow is a mine, the walls of which glisten with precious stones; be sure and do not retrace your steps into daylight without some specimens. Sorrow is a school. You are sent to sit on its hard benches and learn from its black-lettered pages lessons which will make you wise forever; do not trifle away your chance of graduating there. Miss Havergal used to talk of "turned lessons"!

Count on the afterward.- God will not always be causing grief. He traverses the dull brown acres with His plough, seaming the yielding earth that He may be able to cast in the precious grain. Believe that in days of sorrow He is sowing light for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Look forward to the reaping. Anticipate the joy which is set before you, and which shall flood your heart with minstrel notes when patience has had her perfect work.

You will live to recognize the wisdom of God's choice for you. You will one day see that the thing you wanted was only second best. You will be surprised to remember that you once nearly broke your heart and spilled the wine of your life for what would never have satisfied you if you had caught it, as the child the butterfly or soap-bubble. You will meet again your beloved. You will have again your love. You will become possessed of a depth of character, a breadth of sympathy, a fund of patience, an ability to understand and help others, which, as you lay them at Christ's feet for Him to use, will make you glad that you were afflicted. You will see God's plan and purpose; you will reap His harvest; you will behold His face, and be satisfied. Each wound will have its pearl; each carcass will contain a swarm of bees; each foe, like Midian to Gideon, will yield its goodly spoil.

The way of the cross, rightly borne, is the only way to the everlasting light. The path that threads the Garden of Gethsemane, and climbs over the hill of Calvary, alone conducts to the visions of the Easter morning and the glories of the Ascension mount. If we will not drink of His cup, or be baptized with His baptism, or fill up that which is behind of His sufferings, we cannot expect to share in the joys of His espousals and the ecstasy of His triumph. But if these conditions are fulfilled, we shall not miss one note in the everlasting song, one element in the bliss that is possible to men.

Remember that .somehow suffering rightly borne enriches and helps mankind.-The death of Hallam was the birthday of Tennyson's "In Memoriam." The cloud of insanity that brooded over Cowper gave us the hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way." Milton's blunders taught him to sing of "Holy light, offspring of heaven's first-born." Rist used to say, "The cross has pressed many songs out of me." And it is probable that none rightly suffer anywhere without contributing something to the alleviation of human grief, to the triumph of good over evil, of love over hate, and of light over darkness.

If you believe this, could you not bear to suffer? Is not the chief misery of all suffering its loneliness, and perhaps its apparent aimlessness? Then dare to believe that no man dieth to himself. Fall into the ground, bravely and cheerfully, to die. If you refuse this, you will abide alone; but if you yield to it, you will bear fruit which will sweeten the lot and strengthen the life of others who perhaps will never know your name, or stop to thank you for your help.