

Articles and Sermons :: FULLNESS OF JOY-MacDuff

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FULLNESS OF JOY

"This is the resting place, let the weary rest; and this is the place of repose"—

"You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound." Psalm 4:7

"The glorious freedom of the children of God." Romans 8:21

These are two gracious Palm-trees interweaving their fronds over the heads of the spiritual Pilgrim, and whispering of rest and freedom, security and peace.

How the captive who, through the grated window of his cell, only sees the light—envies the feeblest songsters of the grove which make a perch on the iron bars! Why? Because they are free. They are living in the element for which God designed them. They can mount in the wide sky, poise themselves on wing, and make treetop, or rock, their home, as they please. But how can he, imprisoned within these damp dungeon walls, be happy—severed from all that makes life a blessing? As from his bed of straw he notes their plumage, like a lightning-flash, glancing in the bright rays of a sun he cannot enjoy, how sadly and truthfully does he wail out the aspiration, "Oh, that I had wings, for then would I fly away, and be at rest!"

There is a deeper, sadder truth in all this, regarding the nobler spiritual aspirations of the soul. That soul cannot be satisfied with its exile from true home and liberty and rest. Worldly pleasures, riches, honors, are poor inadequate substitutes for what is higher and more enduring. You may as well dream of filling up a gulf with a few pebbles or grains of sand, as fill the capacities of immortal natures with anything finite. Men may do what they can to quench the spark of immortality within them. In the pursuit of earthly happiness and gain and renown, they may throw baits to the soul, and cheat it into a belief that they are giving it a satisfying portion. Just as the eagle may be satisfied for the moment with the carrion thrown into his cage; or the lion may be appeased for the moment with the food thrown into his den.

But the spiritual nature, rational, immortal, fashioned originally after the image of God, will (with the instinct of these kindly inhabitants of the lower creation) always give evidence of felt conscious degradation, if its aspirations be left limited and fettered with the things of sense and time. There are many men and women caressed in the lap of fortune—pillowed and cushioned and charioted in luxury—with their eye resting on gilded magnificence—their ears regaled with luscious music—their tables abundant with splendor—the world gazing upon them with envious eye as "prosperous and happy"—yet, follow them to their secret rooms, where the false appearance of elation is laid aside, and where the silence and solitude shut out the pomp and pageantry of life—how solemn, how humbling, to know, were that closed door and that lonely heart unlocked, that it would be to hear the child of fortune (a captive prisoner in a gilded cell) wailing out the confession, "I have no gladness with it all. I am not satisfied with it all. There is an aching void in this heart the world can never fill!"

Yes! and nothing earthly can fill it, or impart to it the longed-for "gladness." Not change of scene or circumstance—though many seem to think so—like the wounded bird, making its perch on one bough after another, but the wound no easier: or like the suffering invalid, turning from side to side on his weary pillow, thinking every change will be less irksome, while the gnawing pain remains the same. No! One portion alone can satisfy; One escape, One refuge alone is there from "the windy storm and tempest."

An Oriental writer mentions, regarding the turtle-dove, that it never pauses in its flight; that when its wings are weary, it poises itself on one, while the other droops for a little by its side, and when rested, the interrupted flight proceeds. Beautiful emblem of what, at least, we should seek to be and to do. Resting not—making no perch of the world: but, in the pure cloudless ethereal regions of faith and love and holiness, soaring ever higher to our home in the hills of God!

"Oh, had I, my Savior, the wings of a dove,  
How soon would I soar to Your presence above,  
How soon would I fly where the weary have rest,

And hide all my care, in Your sheltering breast.

"I flutter, I struggle, I pant to get free,  
I feel me a captive while banished from Thee!  
A pilgrim and stranger the desert I roam,  
And look on to Heaven and long to be home!"

"Ah! there the wild tempest forever shall cease;  
No billows shall ruffle that haven of peace,  
Temptation and trouble alike shall depart,  
All tears from the eye, and all sin from the heart!

"Soon—soon may this Eden of promise be mine,  
Rise, bright sun of glory, no more to decline!  
Your light, yet unrisen, the wilderness cheers;  
Oh, what will it be—when the fullness appears!"

"In the Lord I take my refuge. How then can you say to me: 'Flee like a bird to your mountain?'"