

“THE BEST IS YET
TO BE”

By

HENRY DURBANVILLE

Published by

B. McCALL BARBOUR

28 GEORGE IV BRIDGE

EDINBURGH 1, SCOTLAND

<i>First published</i>	<i>August 1950</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>October 1950</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>September 1951</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>October 1952</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>September 1953</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>April 1955</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>April 1957</i>
<i>Revised</i>	<i>November 1959</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>April 1962</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>November 1964</i>
<i>Reprinted</i>	<i>September 1969</i>

(Completing 46,000)

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*Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be—
The last of life, for which the first was made.*

*Our times are in His hand
Who saith, " A whole I planned " ;
Youth shows but half ; trust God ; see all, nor be afraid !*

Robert Browning.

INTRODUCTION

RIGHT down the long years I have held old people in profound and ever-growing reverence ; and, now that I myself am stepping westward, reverence has deepened into love. They have crossed the storm-swept sea of life, and, in doing so, have encountered rough winds and swelling tides ; they have endured heavy trials and borne many sorrows ; but when, in spite of these things, they retain childlike trust in God, and continue wholeheartedly to believe that “ all things work together for good to them that love Him ”, they become outstanding witnesses of the grace of their Lord. If the young men speak of Grandad as “ a fine old fellow ”, and if the girls refer to Grandma as “ a perfect darling ”, you may be pretty certain that these splendid worthies are amongst the fairest flowers in the garden of God.

The Jewish people regarded old age as being in three sections or stages. The first, extending from the 60th to the 70th year, was spoken of as “ the commencement of old age ”. The second, extending from the 70th to the 80th year, was called “ hoary headed age ”. The third, from the 80th year to the end of life, was called “ advanced age ”—those reaching it being described as “ well-stricken in years ”.

Now, the problem that confronts those of us who have reached any one of these stages is how to keep the spirit young while the body grows old ; how the inward man may be renewed day by day, while the outward man perishes ; and a delightful little incident gives us a hint as to how this may be done. An aged

gardener was asked how old he was. "I am an octogeranium", he replied, making a charming blunder which was really an improvement on the meaning of the word he meant to use. "The octogenarian who is also an octogeranium—that is to say, the old man with a young soul, the veteran with an open mind, the ancient pilgrim who maintains the forward look—that person is one of the most attractive of human types." With that story came another equally beautiful one from America, about a fine old warrior well on in his eighties. He was told that a friend of his, aged 75, had said that a man is at his best in his seventies; but the octogenarian would have none of it. "He will know better when he grows up," was his comment! These fine old boys remind me of what, in a moment of enthusiastic admiration, Sam Weller said of Mr. Pickwick: "Blest if I don't think his heart was born twenty-five years after his body"; and if this book should fall into the hands of the man who is to compile the next English dictionary, I would ask him to place the following definition in his volume, namely: "Octogeranium—a person over eighty years of age who retains the freshness of youth." The illustration of it would be Caleb: Joshua 14. 6-12.

Come, then, my fellow-pilgrims, let us travel the road in each other's company for a bit; and as we do so, allow me to tell you some of the things that are in my heart.

Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, has a line in which he says: "By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection which is the noblest; second, by imitation which is the easiest; third, by experience which is the bitterest." One of the African proverbs has a similar message: "*Isala kutshelwa*

sabona ngomopo”—“the man who refuses to listen, will see by the blood stains.” These words, from widely different sources, indicate the two great universities in which most of us have learned life’s greatest lessons ; the hard school of experience, and the harder school of failure : and I desire to speak to you, my beloved sisters and brothers, of some of the things which I, personally, have learned in them. I do this, however, with one aim in view—and that is to brighten that part of the journey which lies immediately ahead of us, and to tell you of One Who, if we but trust Him, will presently conduct us to scenes brighter far.

CHAPTER I

THE GRANDEUR
OF LIFE'S EVENTIDE

AS one thinks of old age, the first thing that occurs to the mind is

ITS GRANDEUR.

“ The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness ” (Prov. 16. 31). When you come to think of it, the greatest things in all the universe are old ; old mountains, old rivers, old seas, old stars ; and this is equally true in the realm of human life. A visitor to India was entertained by an Indian lady of high rank. The visitor was so impressed with her charm and grace that she could not forbear saying : “ I think you are perfectly beautiful,” to which the Indian lady quietly replied : “ I ought to be beautiful, my dear. I am seventy-four years old ! ” What a fine philosophy of life is there !

Since all knowledge, and growth, and development, and character, are cumulative, it follows inevitably that, when those who love the Saviour reach life's eventide, they are

“ Rich in experience that angels might covet,
Rich in a faith that has grown with the years.”

They may not have accumulated much of this world's gear ; their names may never have appeared on the scrolls of earthly fame ; but, since their hearts possess the knowledge-transcending peace of God, and Heaven's

deep, abounding joy, they never miss those things which are so coveted by men of the world.

"What though of gilded baubles He bereaves us,
 Dear to the heart of youth, to manhood's prime?
 Think of the calm He brings, the peace He leaves us,
 The hoarded spoils, the legacies of time."

Nor does the falling into decay of the earthly house of this tabernacle affect the grandeur of old age. The eloquent Dr. Guthrie once said: "They say I am growing old because my hair is silvered, and there are crow's feet on my forehead, and my step is not as firm and elastic as before. But they are mistaken; that is not me. The knees are weak, but the knees are not me. The brow is wrinkled, but the brow is not me. This is the house I live in: but I am young—younger than I was ever before." Of similar import is the word of John Quincy Adams. When he was a very old man someone asked him how he was keeping, and he said: "Thank you, John Quincy Adams is very well himself, sir; but the house in which he lives is falling to pieces. Time and seasons have nearly destroyed it. The roof is well worn, the walls shattered. It trembles with every gale. I think John Quincy Adams will soon have to move out. But he himself is very well, sir."

And what shall I say of those old mothers whose presence brings to us a sense of benediction and peace? "I love old mothers," says an unknown writer:

"I love old mothers—mothers with white hair,
 And kindly eyes, and lips grown softly sweet
 With murmured blessings over sleeping babes.
 There is something in their quiet grace
 That speaks the calm of Sabbath afternoons;
 A knowledge in their deep, unfaltering eyes
 That far outreaches all philosophy."

Time, with caressing touch, about them weaves
The silver-threaded fairy-shawl of age ;
While all the echoes of forgotten songs
Seem joined to lend a sweetness to their speech.
Old mothers ! As they pass, with slow-timed step,
Their trembling hand clings gently to youth's strength.
Sweet mothers ! As they pass, one sees again
Old garden walks, old roses, and old loves."

The conclusion at which we arrive so far, then, is that while youth is beautiful—wondrously beautiful, age has a beauty and a majesty all its own ; and that, although those who are at the beginning of life may acquire much knowledge, those who are nearing its close may possess that wisdom which is knowledge applied.

“ New thoughts are born to youth
Rather than to those more advanced in years ;
In the economy of God the Creator
It is thus ordained.
And yet, with age and the quiet of eventide,
Come thoughts more profound and abiding ;
In mellow contemplation we reflect the glory
Of the setting sun.”

The message which comes to us from this chapter is contained in

ISAIAH 60. 1 :

“ Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”

CHAPTER II

THE REGRETS ACCOMPANYING LATER YEARS

THERE are, however, numbers of our fellow-travellers who dwell but little on the aspect of old age which I have just emphasised. Because of shortcoming, and failure, and sin, they are obsessed with

ITS REGRETS.

Indeed, it has been said that, just as anticipation is the dower of the young, so regret is often the possession of the old. Before we go further in our walk and talk, therefore, I desire that every one of us shall face the facts and get rid, once and for all, of the things that occasion misgiving and unrest.

Again, and again, people have said : “ Oh, that I could have the past thirty, forty, fifty years over again : how differently I would live ! ” But are we quite sure about that ? We have seen that the greatest university in life is the school of experience ; but since, as Coleridge reminds us, experience is like the stern light of a ship at sea, which enlightens only the track that has been passed over, we could not, even with a fresh start, have the accumulated experience of those years whose failures we so deeply lament. But there is another and a deeper sense in which we *may* make a fresh start ; and here I come to the main theme of this book. May God anoint my pen as I write, and your eyes as you read ; for I have a wonderful message to deliver to you.

“ Strife in Heaven ”

In an old poem bearing the above title, the writer imagined himself walking the heavenly streets, when he encountered a company of the redeemed engaged in a very excited discussion. Drawing near to listen, he found that they were debating who among them was the greatest example of the divine grace of salvation.

In the debate, which was long continued, each one advanced claims to prove that he, himself, was the recipient of the greatest measure of God's free grace. It was finally decided that the question should be settled by vote. In process of time the list of competitors was reduced to two. These two were then invited each to state his own case to the company.

The first of the two to speak was a very old man. He declared that it was absolutely impossible that God's grace could have done more for any man than it had done for him. He said that he had led a vile and vicious life. He had been a liar, a thief, a blasphemer, a drunkard, and a murderer. On his deathbed he had confessed his guilt, and, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was forgiven.

The other man just said that he came to the Saviour when he was a boy. He had always led a quiet and peaceful life, full of the joys that Christ gives.

The vote was taken,—and, to the surprise of the writer, the result was in favour of the second speaker. The poet learned the mightier truth, that the grace which, through the long years, can keep a man true, in the midst of much that would drag him from the path of integrity, is an infinitely greater thing than the mercy that washes white the scarlet stains of repentant profligacy. A fence at the top of a precipice is better

than a hospital at the bottom ; prevention is better than cure.

That old story illustrates many points about the Gospel of the grace of God. It tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ; that the man whom divine grace kept in the paths of righteousness was as dependent upon the cleansing blood of the Redeemer, as was he who had strayed into the ways of sin ; that both were saved by the matchless kindness of Heaven. As he neared the end of his earthly career an eminent preacher once said : " I throw overboard my good works and my bad works, and sail to glory on the plank of free grace."

But what about the men and women who have not yet come into personal touch with the Lord Jesus ; who have not yet received Him as Saviour ; who know not the joy of sins forgiven ? Ah ! these are just the loved ones that I desire most earnestly to help ; and if you will follow me carefully for a little, as a lowly servant of the Lord Jesus, I will show you how the past may be blotted out, how the present may be filled with gladness, and how the heart that has, perchance, been lacerated by remorse may, from this hour, find healing, and enter into rest. As, however, old folks like young people, are fond of stories, I will perhaps achieve my purpose most effectively by telling you of some things that happened in America.

Fifty years ago Peter Bilhorn, an American evangelist and singer, was mightily used of God in that vast land. About the year 1900 he received from a friend a clipping from the *Youth's Companion*, containing the poem, "*The Bird with the Broken Wing*," which was written by Hezekiah Butterworth. The message of the poem, in brief, was that the wounded bird was the

most tragic of sights ; that it served mainly as a warning ; that its powers of achievement were practically finished.

“ For the bird with the broken pinion
Never soars as high again.”

Peter’s friend suggested that here was something worth setting to music ; and, after some effort, the singer prepared a musical score for the words, and placed it in his portfolio.

Some weeks later, Bilhorn was invited to conduct a gospel meeting in the Iowa State Prison at Fort Madison. Just before the close of the meeting the Chaplain said : “ Sing us one more song, Peter,” and, without thinking where he was, or how it would sound, the missionary picked up the sheet of the new song, seated himself at the organ, and sang it to the prisoners.

When he had finished, a strange thing happened. A convict, a young man down in the centre, sprang to his feet, and, holding on to the seat in front of him said : “ Chaplain, Chaplain, is that true ? If what he has been singing is true, there is no hope for me or a lot of us here.” And he dropped back into his seat with a sob.

Mr. Bilhorn at once realised the dreadful blunder which he had made, but it was too late to explain or apologise. He went back to Chicago saying : “ It’s not true ; it’s not true. There must be another verse added to that song.” A few days later he wrote :

“ But the soul that comes to Jesus
Is saved from every sin ;
And the heart that fully trusts Him
Shall a crown of glory win.

" Then come to the dear Redeemer,
He will cleanse you from every stain,
By the grace that He freely gives you,
You shall higher soar again."

Then he sat down and wrote to the Chaplain asking for the privilege of a return visit to the prison for another service. Three weeks later he was there. During the service he made his apology, and sang the song with the new verse added.

But that is not the end of the story. In May, 1918—nearly twenty years afterwards—Mr. Bilhorn was at a Camp in Illinois, singing for the Y.M.C.A. On a Sunday morning, at the close of a meeting in the Tabernacle, a tall, splendid-looking officer in a colonel's uniform came down the aisle to the platform, put out his hand, and said: "Hello, Bilhorn. You don't remember me, but I do you. You visited Fort Madison prison eighteen years ago, and sang about, '*The Bird with the Broken Wing*'." "Yes," said Peter, "and every time I think of it I am filled with shame." "Well," said the colonel, "I am the man who asked if the song was true; and when you came back weeks later and gave your testimony, and then sang the new verse, I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. I was able to rise. I am now the colonel of a regiment of infantry preparing to go overseas. By God's grace one *can* higher soar again."

I wonder if any reader, filled with regret because of the past, feels as the colonel did in his young days, before he heard the new verse which Mr. Bilhorn added to the song? It is not necessary to stand behind prison bars for us to become sinners in the sight of God. Every one of us—the writer of this book as really as any of its readers—comes under that category.

“ *All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”
 “ There is *none* righteous, no, not one ” (Rom. 3. 10, 23). If we take the place of the sinner, then are we in the place where Heaven’s choicest gift—a full and a free salvation—can reach us ; for it was for sinners that Jesus died (1 Tim. 1. 15). And, my friends, be assured of the heartiest of welcomes from Him if to Him you come. “ If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? *But there is forgiveness with Thee*, that Thou mayest be feared ” (Psa. 130. 3, 4). “ *Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out,* ” says our Saviour (John 6. 37). He is not willing that any should perish, and can save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him (2 Pet. 3. 9 ; Heb. 7. 25). He frankly forgives (Luke 7. 42). He abundantly pardons (Isa. 55. 7).

I read recently of a wayward boy who had wandered from home, and spent his days and nights in riotous living in the city. Eventually he came to an end of himself, and wrote to his mother asking for forgiveness, and expressing a desire to return. He told her that one day he would pass near the old home, and that, if he saw a white sheet on the clothes-line, he would take that as a sign that he would be welcome. Mother-like, the one who yearned most for his home-coming, gathered up every sheet in the house and hung them on the ropes ! That was her way of saying to her boy, what God says to us in Isaiah 55. 7.

In an Aberdeenshire glen there is a wayside fountain, with a drinking cup attached to it which bears the following inscription in the Gaelic language : “ *Cead mille failte* ” —“ a hundred thousand welcomes.” That motto is a fair interpretation of the invitations of the Gospel ; and, responding to them, you will find yourself

confronted with divine assurances such as these : " He hath not dealt with us after our sins ; not rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us " (Psa. 103. 10-12). " Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage ? He delighteth in mercy . . . Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea " (Mic. 7. 18-19). " Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more " (Heb. 10. 17). " Now is the time of loving welcome ! Now is the day of salvation " (2 Cor. 6. 2. Weymouth).

And so, you see, there is a very real sense in which we may begin afresh ; a divine method by which the moan of regret shall be exchanged for the shout of victory. Listen :

" Lord, at Thy feet my prostrate heart is lying,
 Worn with the burden, weary of the way ;
 The world's proud sunshine on the hills is dying,
 And morning's promise fades with parting day.
 Yet, in Thy light, another morn is breaking,
 Of fairer promise and with pledge more true ;
 And in Thy life a dawn of youth is waking,
 Whose bounding pulses shall this heart renew.

" Oh, to go back across the years long vanished,
 To have the words unsaid, the deeds undone,
 The errors cancelled, the deep shadows banished,
 In the glad sense of a new life begun.
 To be a little child, whose page of story
 Is yet undimmed, unblotted by a stain,
 And in the sunrise of primeval glory
 To know that life has had its start again.

“ *I may* go back across the years long vanished,
 I may resume my childhood, Lord, in Thee,
When in the shadow of Thy cross are banished
 All other shadows that encompass me ;
And o’er the road that now is rough and dreary,
 This soul, made buoyant by a strength divine,
Shall walk untired, shall run and not be weary,
 To bear the blessings that have made Thee mine.”

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

JOEL 2. 25 :

“ I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.”

CHAPTER III

THE JOYS OF GROWING OLD

LET us turn to a happier phase of our theme. We have spoken of the regrets of old age ; now let us think of

Its Joys.

I begin by quoting the testimony of one who drank deeply of them, and whose words have been a blessing to me. He says : “ My mouth is full of laughter and my heart is full of joy.” I feel so sorry for folks who don't like to grow old, and who are trying all the time to hide the fact that they are growing old, and who are ashamed to tell how old they are. I revel in my years. They enrich me. If God should say to me, “ I will let you begin over again, and you may have your youth back once more,” I should say, “ Oh, dear Lord, if Thou dost not mind, I prefer to go on growing old.”

I would not exchange the peace of mind, the abiding rest of soul, the measure of wisdom I have gained from the sweet and bitter and perplexing experiences of life ; nor the confirmed faith I now have in the moral order of the universe, and in the unfailing mercies and love of God, for all the bright and uncertain hopes and tumultuous joys of youth. Indeed, I would not !

These are the best years of my life—the sweetest, and the most free from anxious care. The way grows brighter ; the birds sing sweeter ; the winds blow softer ; the sun shines more radiantly than ever before. I suppose “ my outward man ” is perishing, but “ my

inward man " is being joyously renewed day by day.

Some lessons that I have learned, or partially learned, I here pass on :

1. *That we cultivate faith in God*—in His providence ; in His superintending care ; in His unfailing love.

2. *That we accept the bitter in life, along with the sweet, and rejoice in both.* The bitter may be better for us than the sweet. We shouldn't be impatient or fretful. If we " fall into divers temptations, (or find ourselves hedged in by various trials [Weymouth])," we should " count it all joy, knowing that the trial of our faith worketh patience "; we should " let patience have her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing ".

Victory is to be attained through the joyful acceptance of annoying trials, and petty vexations, as a part of God's discipline (James I. 2-7).

3. *We should keep a heart full of love towards everybody.* We should learn to be patient with folks who try our patience. If we can't love them with complacency, then we may love them with compassion and pity ; but we should *love* them, pray for them, and should not carry about with us hard thoughts and feelings toward them.

4. *We should not waste time living in the past, and mourning over the failures of yesterday, or the long ago.* We should commit these to God and look upward and onward (Phil. 3. 13-14).

Oh ! the joy of living a life of service ; of love ; and of growing up into Him in all things, which is the Head—even Christ. Such a life never grows old ; it is perpetually renewed and has a perennial freshness, like the springing, sparkling fountain fed by the unfailing

waters flowing down from the everlasting hills.
Hallelujah !

Dr. Stevens quotes the testimony of one who knew John Wesley in his later years. " So fine an old man I never saw. The happiness of his mind beamed forth in his countenance ; every look showed how fully he enjoyed the gay remembrance of his life well spent. Wherever he went he diffused a portion of his own felicity. . . . While the grave and serious were charmed with his wisdom, his sportive sallies of innocent mirth delighted even the young and thoughtless. In him old age appeared delightful—like an evening without a cloud ; and it was impossible to observe him without wishing frequently : ' may my latter end be like this '."

I was reading, only the other day, of an old saint, of whom it was told that she used to say : " Try living every moment of each individual day without spoiling the present by grumbling over the disappointments of the past, or by fears for the future." One of her slogans was " arise joyfully ", whatever one may have to face during the day.

In his last message to the world, W. H. Lax of Poplar, who did such a marvellous work for God and man among the poor of that London district, has some wise counsels. He points out that there are two sorts of age. There is the age of the body, and the age of the mind. The one, to a large extent, governs the other. You cannot keep the two apart.

" The age of the body, apart from actual disease, depends upon the vital organs ; the heart, lungs, and the like. These are ' set ' for a certain period. They may get worn out, either by fair wear and tear, or, much sooner, by unfair wear and tear. You cannot help that.

“ But you can control the age of your mind. You can, if you face life in the right spirit, keep the mind young almost indefinitely. And remember that the mind controls the activities and energies of all the rest of the body. It is the supreme organ. If you let the mind grow old the body will grow old also.

“ How are you to keep the mind young? The most important thing is to cultivate a cheerful spirit, never allowing pessimism to gain the upper hand. Make up your mind to maintain a buoyant outlook on life. When the sun shines, let it shine on you. Grey days will come, but always think of the sunny days which must assuredly follow. Hang on to your sense of humour with both hands. The older you grow, the more you will need it. Most of the neurotic wrecks one sees, and some of the mental ones, are the natural result of a morbid outlook on life.

“ And keep an open, active mind. You cannot keep the mind young if you persist in looking at the gloomy side, or in closing it to new ideas, muffling it up in prejudices and stifling its enthusiasms. It is losing the thrill and zest of life that makes a man old. He doesn't lose the thrill because he is old ; he becomes old because he has lost the thrill. The moment a man loses his sense of wonder at the beauty of a sunset, or the glory of heroism and self-sacrifice, or the intricate markings on a butterfly's wing, or the marvels of science—he becomes old.”

It was said of Lord Guthrie that he grew with the years in tolerance, openness of mind, and sympathetic understanding. He never grew old in spirit and outlook, but kept eagerness and buoyancy of youth to the end.

I must not forget to say that, for a Christian, the two

sources of purest joy are the devotional reading of the Bible, and prayer. Hear the testimonies of some of the saints regarding the first of these : Job, chapter 23. 12 ; David, Psalm 119. 97 ; Jeremiah, chapter 15. 16. Read carefully also John 15 and Colossians 3.

As regards the second—prayer secures joy—(John 16. 24), and brings the heart into a condition of peace—(Phil. 4. 6-7). I shall speak more fully of these two things in the next chapter.

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

HABAKKUK 3. 17-18:

“ Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

CHAPTER IV
THE PERILS
ATTENDING THE ELDERLY

WITH the mind at rest regarding the past, and the heart revelling in the consciousness of being at peace with God, you may have entertained the thought that all dangers are over, and that you will have no more problems as you journey to the Better Land. But that is not so. Scripture and human biography alike testify to the fact that old age has

ITS PERILS.

Noah, after long years of faithful walking with God, failed ignominiously (Gen. 6. 9 ; 9. 20-21). Moses, the meekest man in all the earth, at near the close of his career, lost his temper, and spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and, as a consequence, saw, but was not allowed to enter, the Promised Land (Num. 12. 3; Psalm 106. 32-33). Samuel, the man of prayer and the prophet of God, put family interests before loyalty to God and His people (1 Sam. 8. 1-5). Solomon, began his reign magnificently but ended disastrously. Uzziah, after a glorious reign, lifted up his heart to his own destruction, and deliberately transgressed the ordinance of God, in consequence finishing his days as a leper (2 Chron. 26. 16-21).

The records of all these good men, temporarily drawn aside from the path of fellowship with God, give point and urgency to the apostle's warning : " Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall " (1 Cor.

10. 12). The fact is that youth, manhood, age— each period of life—has its own temptations and hazards.

The all-inclusive safeguard against these perils is found in Jude 20, 21 : “ But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

The epistle of Jude deals with days of declension, apostasy, and peril. The writer of it points out the dangers that would characterise the times in which we are now living ; and in the verses before us he indicates the path of safety amid these dangers.

Careful examination of the sacred words shows that they are in four clauses. One of these holds a stirring exhortation, which is the central thing in the passage : “ *Keep yourselves in the love of God.*” The other three clauses show how the exhortation may be obeyed : “ Building up yourselves on your most holy faith ; praying in the Holy Ghost ; looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” The whole passage is thus summed up in four verbs : Building, Praying, Keeping, Looking.

The exhortation

“ Keep yourselves in the love of God.” It is very important to notice that this counsel does not mean that we keep ourselves loving God, but rather that we keep ourselves within the atmosphere and range of God’s love to us. Let me illustrate just what I mean by that.

To an invalid friend, who was a trembling, doubting believer, and who bemoaned the feebleness of his love to God, a wise minister of the Gospel once said : “ When I leave you I shall go to my own residence, and when

there, the first thing that I expect to do is to call for a baby that is in the house. I expect to place her on my knee, and look down into her sweet eyes, and listen to her charming prattle ; and, tired as I am, her presence will rest me ; for I love that child with unutterable tenderness.

“ But the fact is that she does not love me ; or to say the most for her, she loves me but very little. If my heart were breaking under a burden of crushing sorrow it would not disturb her sleep. If my body were racked with pain it would not interrupt her play with her toys. If I were dead she would be amused in watching my pale face and closed eyes. Besides this, she has never brought me in a penny, but has been a constant expense on my hands ever since she was born. Yet, although I am not rich in this world’s possessions, there is not money enough in this world to buy my baby. How is it ? Does she love me or do I love her ? Do I withhold my love until I know she loves me ? Am I waiting for her to do something worthy of my love before extending it to her ? ”

“ Oh, I see it,” said the sick man, while the tears streamed down his cheeks ; “ I see it clearly. It is not my love to God, but God’s love to me that I ought to be thinking about, and I do love Him, blessed be His name.”

Carefully note this, my friends, that although John loved the Lord Jesus intensely, he never speaks of himself as “ *the disciple who loved Jesus.*” But five times in his gospel is he spoken of as “ *the disciple whom Jesus loved* ” (chapter 13. 23 ; 19. 26 ; 20. 2 ; 21. 7 ; 21. 20). It is quite true that we love Him because He first loved us ; but our love to Him is like

the light of a farthing candle, while His love to us is like the light of the meridian sun.

Now, the exhortation which we are considering—"keep yourselves in the love of God"—is really an echo of the Saviour's words in John 15. 9: "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: *continue* ye in My love." It is as if a mother said to her sickly little boy, as she sends him outside: "Now, keep yourself in the sunshine; don't go into the shadows." Nature and Life are full of similar illustrations.

When Archbishop Ussher, the celebrated chronologist, was an old man he felt the cold intensely, and his attendant endeavoured to keep him constantly in the sunshine. In the morning his chair would be wheeled to an eastern window; at noon, to a southerly window; and in the afternoon, to a westerly window. A little London girl won a prize at a flower show. Her prize flower was grown in an old cracked teapot, in the rear window of the attic in a wretched tenement house. When asked how she managed to grow so perfect a flower in such surroundings, she said she always moved it around to wherever there was a sunbeam. In cold countries birds are fond of catching the last evening rays of the winter sun, and are always found where these rays can reach them. They ascend from crag to crag as the sun keeps lowering, until, finally, they are all gathered on the last ridge on which the sun shines. They keep themselves in the sun. These all illustrate the exhortation which we have been considering: "The Father Himself loveth you"; keep yourselves ever in the enjoyment of it.

Now comes the question: "How best can we do this?" The answer is threefold.

(a) *We must be lovers of the Bible.*

“ Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” Since the great doctrines of our faith are enshrined in the written Word of God, we must keep growing in the knowledge of that Word. For faith is the response in the heart of man to a revelation from the Unseen ; it cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. “ Building ” suggests patient industry and graduated progress.

And there must be growing obedience to what we learn. The Word is the quarry from which we take the blocks wherewith we build ; obedience fits these blocks into the structure of the life ; and thus we shall keep ourselves in His love. “ If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love ; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love ” (John 15. 10).

How to use the Bible

The Psalmist says : “ Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee ” (Psalm 119. 11) ; and, when we speak on that verse to the little people, we tell them that there you have the right word—Thy Word ; in the right place—my heart ; for the right purpose—that I may not sin against God. We older folk are the children of eternity ; we, too, need to hide our Father’s Word in our hearts ; and so I pass on a few suggestions that may enable you rightly to divide the Word of truth.

When you are in sorrow, read John 14.

When men fail you, read Psalm 27.

When you have sinned, read Psalm 51.

When you are worried, read Matthew 6.

When God seems far away, read Psalm 139.
 When you are discouraged, read Isaiah 40.
 If you want to be fruitful, read John 15.
 To recount your blessings, read Psalm 103.
 When your faith is weak, read Hebrews 11.
 When you want courage, read Joshua 1.
 When feeling down and out, read Romans 8.
 When loved ones pass on, read Psalm 90.
 When inclined to be critical, read 1 Corinth. 13.
 Before undertaking a journey, read Psalm 121.
 Before going to church, read Psalm 84.

(b) *We must maintain habits of prayer.*

"Praying in the Holy Ghost." "Prayer being, in the divine appointment, essential to our spiritual health," says the Friends' Book of Discipline, "we would earnestly press upon all to seek for opportunities in the course of each day, for private retirement and waiting upon the Lord; and tenderly to cherish those precious, but often gentle and easily-resisted motions of the Lord's Spirit, which would humble our hearts and draw them forth in fervent petitions."

Experience shows that the best time for prayer is the early morning. The day-break blessing is the day-long gain. George Müller, who knew more about prayer than most, says: "The morning is the gate of the day and should be well guarded by prayer. It is one end of the thread on which the day's actions are strung, and should be well knotted with devotion. If we felt more the majesty of life, we should be more careful of its mornings. He who rushes from his bed to his business and waiteth not to worship, is as unwise as he who dashes into battle without armour. Be it ours to bathe in the softly flowing river of communion

with God, before the heat of the wilderness and the burden of the way begin to oppress.”

SIR JAMES BARRIE'S MOTHER

In one of the loveliest little monographs in English literature, Sir James Barrie gives an intimate picture of his mother, revealing her faith in God, and her daily practice of reading the Scriptures and praying for her loved ones.

“ She began the day by the fireside, with the New Testament in her hands, an old volume with its loose pages beautifully refixed, and its covers sewn and re-sewn by her, so that you would say it can never fall to pieces. It is mine now, and to me the black threads with which she stitched it are as part of the contents. Other books she read in the ordinary manner, but this one differently, her lips moving with each word as if she were reading aloud, and her face was solemn. The Testament lies open on her lap long after she has ceased to read, and the expression on her face has not changed.”

“ Then, at the close of the day,” he says, “ she brings out the Testament again ; it was always lying within reach. And when she has read for a long time she ‘ gives me a look ’ as we say in the North, and I go out, to leave her alone with God. She had been but a child when her mother died, and so she fell early into the way of saying her prayers with no earthly listener. Often and often I have found her on her knees, but I always went softly away, closing the door. I never heard her pray, but I know very well how she prayed, and that, when the door was shut, there was not a day, in God's sight, between the worn woman and the little child.”

Sir James says further that, when the aged pilgrim was nearing the end, his father put her New Testament in her hands, and that it fell open—as it always did—at the 14th chapter of John. She made an effort to read but could not. Suddenly she stooped and kissed the page. " Will that do instead ? " she asked.

(c) *We must keep looking for our Lord's return.*

" Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The reference here is without any doubt to that advent of our Saviour for which we are bidden to look. The New Testament is full of teaching about this blessed hope, and we lose much if we fail to cherish it in our hearts. Over 300 times is it spoken of in the later portion of the inspired Word, and the place which it occupies there, indicates the place which it should hold in our thinking.

The central ordinance of the Church—the remembrance of the Lord's death—is described in 1st Corinthians II. 23-26. That great passage is both commemorative and anticipative ; it directs us historically to the night of His betrayal, and prophetically to the day of His return. The last six words of verse 26—" the Lord's death till He come "—tell the whole story. The first three of these words point us back to His cross ; the last three point us on to His coming. Taken together, the six words are like a beautiful rainbow, the one end of which dips in the sufferings of Christ, and the other, in the glory that is to follow.

" And thus that dark betrayal-night,
With His next advent we unite,
By one blest chain of loving rite,
Until He come."

This blessed hope is used by the Holy Spirit as the incentive to the exemplification of practically every grace or virtue named in the New Testament ; and the apprehension of it in living power will do much to enable us to keep ourselves in the love of God.

In central Africa, when an early start has to be made the following morning, the native carriers, after their evening meal round the camp fire in the forest, repeat to one another the word "Lutanda" and then fall asleep. This African word means "the morning star", and the repetition of it is the reminder that they would have to be up with the early star next morning, pack their loads, and resume their march. With spiritual understanding of what will take place when the true Morning Star appears, what profound meanings we can read into "Lutanda". When that glad hour arrives we shall enter the city, of which it is said that "there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light ; and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22. 8). In the words of Dr. Macduff, therefore, we exultingly exclaim :

" With that blessed hope before us,
Let no harp remain unstrung,
Let the mighty advent chorus
Onward roll from tongue to tongue:
Christ is coming !
Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come."

We learn, then, that while He is able to keep us from falling, we are to co-operate with Him in that keeping. It is those who are preserved in Jesus Christ, and who will ultimately be presented before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, that are asked to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude, ver. 24 and 21).

And, fulfilling that injunction, we shall face the perils ahead of us with unflinching courage, and we shall be able to say to these hearts of ours :

" Why those fears ? Behold 'tis Jesus holds the helm and guides the ship ;
 Spread the sails and catch the breezes sent to waft us through the deep,
 To the regions where the mourners cease to weep.

" Though the shore we hope to land on, only by report is known,
 Yet we freely all abandon, led by that report alone,
 And, with Jesus, through the trackless deep move on.

" Rendered safe by His protection, we shall pass the watery waste,
 Trusting to His wise direction we shall gain the port at last,
 And, with wonder, think on toils and dangers past.

" Oh, what pleasures there await us ; there the tempests cease to roar ;
 There it is that they who hate us, can molest our peace no more.
 Trouble ceases on that tranquil, happy shore."

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

ISAIAH 41. 10 :

" Fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness."

CHAPTER V
THE LIMITATIONS
OF ADVANCING YEARS

ANOTHER thing about old age, of which we become increasingly conscious with the passing of the years, is

ITS LIMITATIONS.

You are no longer equal to the tasks which once you undertook with ease. The eye may be dim, the ear dull, the breath short, the heart faint, the hand unsteady, and the golden bowl of life almost broken. And because these things are in contrast with the long day of usefulness which you enjoyed, you are inclined to be despondent ; you feel that you are a burden to others, and that you are in their way. Dr. Robert Horton, who, in the zenith of his power, could hold the multitudes spellbound by the magic of his eloquence, suffered in his later years from this very feeling. Churches did not want his services, publishers did not want his manuscripts, people did not ask for his counsel.

“ Yet if we accept our lot with a quiet patience, not chafing against it, we may find that it is not without its compensations. Indeed, acceptance itself may bring peace. I was talking the other day with a friend about a man whose failing health had compelled him, with much reluctance, to resign an important charge. He began to mend from the day he made up his mind that he could go on no longer. The same holds good where no question of bodily health is involved. A man

discovers one day that his mind has lost its old elasticity ; that it is no longer equal to the tasks laid upon it ; and that those who came after him are being preferred before him. Fretful impatience cannot alter the facts, although it may murder his own peace of mind. Let him accept them as the will of God for him ; then all the bitterness goes.”

You remember Madam Guyon’s wonderful words ?

“ Thou sweet belovèd will of God,
My anchor ground, my fortress hill,
My spirit’s silent, fair abode,
In Thee I hide me, and am still.

“ Within this place of certain good,
Love evermore expands her wings,
Or nestling in Thy perfect choice,
Abides content with what it brings.

“ O lightest burden, sweetest yoke !
It lifts, it bears my happy soul,
It giveth wings to this poor heart ;
My freedom is Thy grand control.

“ Upon God’s will I lay me down,
As child upon its mother’s breast ;
No silken couch, nor softest bed,
Could ever give me such deep rest.

“ Thy wonderful, grand will, my God,
With triumph now I make it mine ;
And faith shall cry a joyous ‘ Yes ’
To every dear command of Thine.”

There is one other thing I would touch on now, because I find many old comrades—men and women—distressed by it, and that is, failure of memory. Although they have been readers of the Bible all their lives, they frequently find it difficult, and sometimes

impossible, to recall the sacred words which they love so well. For such I am going to quote from a widely read magazine, words which have a distinct message of cheer. Dr. White, the editor of *The King's Business*, tells how, as a young preacher, he received one morning a message saying : " Father Junkins is dying, and he wants to see you, Pastor." The dying man was 87 years of age, and the outstanding Christian of the village. With fear and trembling God's servant went to the old man, praying as he did so : " O God give me a message for this dying saint." When he entered the sick chamber, the dear aged believer said : " Oh, Pastor, I am dying. For years I have been feasting on the promises of God ; but this morning when I woke up I could not remember one of them. What shall I do ? " " Then," said the Doctor, " God gave me an answer, on which, after visiting the bedsides of scores of dying saints during forty years, I cannot improve. I said to him : ' Father Junkins, do you think that *God* will forget any of His promises ? ' I shall always remember the sweet smile that came over the face of the old saint as he looked up at me. ' Praise God,' he said, ' that is wonderful. He will remember them, won't He ? ' Promise after promise was quoted to him, and presently he said : ' I'm tired. I'll just fall asleep and trust Him to remember His precious promises to me.' In a few hours he had gone Home to be with the Promiser."

Listen to some words of One Who never forgets. Of the *past* He says of His people : " I took them by the hand " (Heb. 8. 9) ; of the *present* : " I the Lord will hold thine hand " (Isa. 42. 6) ; and of the *future* : " I will never, never, let go your hand " (Heb. 13. 5, Weymouth). And listen, too, to one of those beautiful

poems with which my old friend, James Danson Smith, has enriched the Church and the people of God :

" When from my life the old-time joys have vanished—
Treasures, once mine, I may no longer claim,
This truth may feed my hungry heart, and famished—
Lord, THOU REMAINEST ! Thou art still the same !

" When streams have dried, those streams of glad re-
freshing—
Friendships so blest, so pure, so rich, so free ;
When sun-kissed skies give place to clouds depressing—
Lord, THOU REMAINEST, still my heart hath THEE.

" When strength hath failed, and feet, now worn and weary,
On gladsome errands may no longer go,
Why should I sigh, or let the days be dreary ?
Lord, THOU REMAINEST ! Couldst Thou more bestow ?

" Thus through life's days—whoe'er or what may fail me—
Friends, friendships, joys—in small or great degree—
Songs may be mine—no sadness need assail me,
Since, THOU REMAINEST, and my heart hath THEE."

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

HEBREWS 4. 14-16 :

" Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

CHAPTER VI
THE LONELINESS
OF THE AGEING PILGRIM

IN your long experience of life you will doubtless have observed that one of the most distressing things about old age is

ITS LONELINESS.

A minister of the Gospel in America, who conducts a newspaper feature entitled "Everyday Living", which reaches millions of people, receives, in the course of his work, mountains of letters on the practical problems of life. From thousands of these letters he learns that Private Enemy Number One in human life is Fear; that Number Two is Worry; and Number Three, Loneliness. The last-named of these three disturbers of the heart's peace is the one of which we become increasingly conscious as the years speed over our heads; for, one by one, our loved ones pass from us, until, ultimately, we find ourselves alone. In the case of an ideally happy marriage, the loss of either partner can occasion great sorrow; for, ever and anon, in the heart of the one who is left, there is the cry for "the touch of the vanished hand, and the sound of the voice that is still".

Our Heavenly Father is not unmindful of our need of companionship during the days of our years upon the earth, and has made gracious provision for it. We are now, therefore, to examine that provision; and, as we do so, we shall find that, whereas our human friendships are subject to the vicissitudes of time, the Divine

Comradeship is independent of them ; that while *they* may be shattered at any moment, this shall abide till travelling days are done.

The first outstanding promise that God would be with His people is that which was given to Jacob in Genesis 28. 13-16, " Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." That promise, adapted to circumstances, was repeated to Moses (Exodus 3. 12) ; and to Joshua (Joshua 1. 5).

If we take God's further promise to Moses in Exodus 33. 14 (" My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest ") as a kind of motto, we shall find that it can be applied to all the forms of trial that we may encounter on our way to the heavenly land. Thus : " My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee *rest* "—in the midst of conflict (Ex. 33. 14) ; *courage*, in the hour of danger (Isa. 41. 10) ; *companionship*, in times of sorrow (Isa. 43. 2) ; *confidence*, as we tread the valley of the shadow of death (Psa. 23. 4).

Passing to the New Testament, we observe that while Matthew's Gospel *opens* with the announcement of the coming Saviour (chapter 1. 21), it *closes* with the assurance of the perpetual presence of the Saviour Who *has* come (chapter 28. 20). " Lo I am with you all the days " (R.V. margin). " All the days—in winter days, when joys are fled ; in sunless days, when the clouds return again and again after rain ; in days of sickness and pain ; in days of temptation and perplexity, as much as in days when the heart is as full of joy as the woodlands in spring are full of song. That day never comes when the Lord Jesus is not at the side of His saints. Lover and friend may stand afar, but He walks with them through the fires ; He fords with them the rivers ; He stands by them when face to face

with the lion. We can never be alone." Of Him it can truthfully be affirmed, that He will never bid us " Good-bye " (Heb. 13. 5).

" About, above me, evermore,
Christ's gentle presence broods,
He shares with me my silences,
He fills my solitudes.

" His face, His form, I cannot see,
No spoken word can hear,
But with some finer sense of soul
Do I perceive Him near.

" Oh, how my heart within me burns !
What ecstasy is mine,
That He thus vouchsafes unto me
His comradeship divine.

" Are not these joys too sweet to last ?
May He not soon depart ?
' Lo, I am with you all the days '
He answereth my heart."

There are three great Biblical names, whose spiritual meanings unfold what God can be to His people during the days of their pilgrimage. These words cover, not only the special need of which we have been thinking, but also every problem and difficulty which we may encounter as we journey to the Land of Rest. The first is " Ebenezer ", which means, " Hitherto hath the Lord helped us " (1 Sam. 7. 12). The second is " Emmanuel ", which means, " God with us " (Matt. 1. 23). The third is " Jehovah-Jireh ", which means, " The Lord will provide " (Gen. 22. 14).

" Ebenezer "—with all the happy memories that it recalls—that is the only word that adequately explains the past. " Emmanuel "—with all the wealth of

comradeship that it connotes—that is the only word that can give assurance for the present. "Jehovah-Jireh"—with all the boundless provision that it implies—that is the only word that can impart confidence as we face the future.

And now let me give you two illustrations of how these things work out in actual experience. One of them is from the Bible, and the other from Church History.

Joseph, who was destined to occupy a unique place in the development of God's earthly purposes, had been ruthlessly torn from his home, and was eventually sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of the Egyptian guard (Gen. 39. 1). But we read that, in these dire circumstances, "the Lord was with His young servant, and that he was a prosperous man (verse 2). Later on, he was charged with a grave offence of which he was innocent, and was cast into prison (verses 19, 20). But again, it is stated that, even there, God was with this noble man : "The Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (verses 21-23). If we are living in unclouded fellowship with God, "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage". Joseph proved that His divine Friend was as really with him in the pit and in the dungeon, as He was when, later on, by the exercise of divinely imparted wisdom, he saved the Egyptian empire from annihilation.

John Chrysostom was the most eloquent preacher of his age. Because of his loyalty to God and truth, he came under the ban of the emperor, and by him was driven into exile. Writing to a friend from his wilderness home, this eminent servant of Christ said : "You lament my banishment ; but since I knew that

Heaven was my country, I have esteemed the whole earth as a place of exile. Constantinople, from which I am expelled, is as distant from Paradise as is the desert to which they send me." To the man who could use such language, God was the ever-present Helper, the never-failing Friend.

Beloved children of the King, let us ever remember, as friend after friend departs, that the God Who lived in Joseph's time, and in John Chrysostom's time, is just the same to-day. He remains (Heb. 1. 11) ; He abides ; and " the wilderness and the solitary place " may even yet become the place of " joy and singing ".

The message which comes to us from this chapter is contained in

ISAIAH 46. 4 :

" Even to your old age I am He ; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you : I have made, and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

CHAPTER VII
THE OPPORTUNITIES
OF LIFE'S RIPENED YEARS

AND now, continuing our theme of old age, let me speak of

ITS OPPORTUNITIES.

At one time the coins of Spain were stamped with the two pillars of Hercules. These were representative of the two promontories of the rock of Gibraltar. Over the figure a scroll was stamped, with the words "Ne plus ultra"—"No more beyond". But when Columbus sailed far beyond those pillars, and discovered a new world, Spain changed her coins. The word "Ne" was struck off, leaving "plus ultra"—"more beyond".

Now, you may have been thinking that, since you have given up business, it is henceforth for you to be "ne plus ultra"; that after retiral there is no more that you can do. But that is far from being the case. Indeed, unless you get rid of that idea immediately you are likely to suffer for it. For it is literally true that :

" Our tasks may glow like jewels, or coruscate like gems,
But once their motive is withdrawn the deadly ebb begins;
We call it 'hardened arteries', 'pneumonia' and 'flu',
But men will die of heartbreak when they've nothing left
to do."

Listen to these words from an old writer : " The influence of a Christian in old age is one of cumulative and peculiar power. It gathers into itself the forces of long-tried character, and is rich in ripened experience. The work which a Christian man does in

his closing years of life often has a spiritual vitality in it which that of his busier manhood had not. Blessed is the life that, as it draws nearer to eternal realities, in the lessening of its hold on things present, and increasing quietness of outward action, discovers the calm trust, the joy in peace, the strong confidence in things eternal and invisible, that make old age a sunset hour that fears no night, but waits the breaking of the morning. There is service still to render in the ministry of a life that exemplifies the gifts of the Spirit—a service that is more abundant in its fruitage than those who bestow it realise. There are victories still to be won. Physical disabilities and weakness often cause depression and heaviness of heart. Sometimes the memories of the years gone by fill the horizon of thought and feeling with swift flying clouds, whose shadows dim the sunshine. But there is given to the waiting, trusting heart the victory of faith. Heaven lies back of the clouds. The chastening of divine love through weariness and pain ripens the fruit of righteousness.”

When is a man at his best ?

Correspondence on this subject appeared in one of London's leading newspapers a few years ago, and elicited some very interesting facts. Sir George Birdwood led off by saying that “ the older a man is, so long as he is quite fit, the better he is intellectually—the broader his vision, the saner and wiser his outlook, and the more mature his opinions ”. And then there came this letter :

“ To the Editor of the Daily Mail.

Sir—It is not good for the race to believe that a man's

best days are over at sixty. It tends to break down man's energy, and prevents him from utilising the best that is within him—the best that has come from years of experience and work.

" There are figures to show that the greatest productivity of man's life lies in the decade between his sixtieth and seventieth year. The method adopted to learn the actual facts relating to man's working period was as follows :

" Some four hundred names of the most noted men in all times, from all lines of activity, were chosen. There were statesmen, painters, warriors, poets, and writers of fiction, history, and other prose works. Opposite to the name of each man was indicated his greatest work or achievement. This list was then submitted to critics, to learn their opinion of the greatest work of each man submitted. The names of their greatest works were accepted, or altered, until the list was one that could be finally accepted. After this was done the date at which the work was produced was placed after the name, and so the age was ascertained at which the individual was at his best. The list was then arranged according to decades.

" It was found that the decade of years between sixty and seventy contained thirty-five per cent of the world's greatest achievements. Between the ages of seventy and eighty, twenty-three per cent of the achievements fell ; and in the years after eightieth, six per cent.

" In other words, sixty-four per cent of the great things of the world have been accomplished by men who had passed their sixtieth year; the greatest percentage, thirty-five, being in the seventh decade.

" The figures for the other periods of life are

interesting. Between the fiftieth and the sixtieth years are found twenty-five per cent, between forty and fifty, ten per cent. These, all totalled together, leave the almost negligible quantity of one per cent to be attributed to the period below the age of forty.

“ Two great classes of work fall below the forty year limit. These are the deeds which require the extreme of physical power and vim, as the conquests of Alexander the Great ; and the beautiful expression of the lyric poetry, which is typified by the nervous, super-sensitive temperament of such men as Shelley and Keats. But, taken as a whole, the figures prove conclusively that the period of the greatest achievement in a man's life comes, not when he is in his youth, but only with the years of mature manhood.

(Signed) Martin Sherwood.”

It is indeed very remarkable to find, thus recorded, that only one per cent of the world's greatest achievements were accomplished by men before they reached the age of forty, while sixty-four per cent were effected after the age of sixty, and six per cent after even the eightieth year. Dr. W. F. Johnson of India says : “ Counting pulpit, class-room, and press work, the ten most useful years of my life as a missionary, were those between the years of seventy and eighty.”

Let there be no more talk, therefore, of you young men, of between sixty and eighty years of age, settling down and doing nothing. By acting in that way you may be robbing the Church and the world of some of the choicest gifts with which God intends to enrich them.

A charming story is told of Sylvester Horne, the great London preacher. He told his friend, Kingscote

Greenland, that he had just preached a sermon to old men and women, and asked him to guess what his text was. " Oh," said Mr. Greenland, " Come unto Me all ye that are weary." " No," responded Mr. Horne. " At eventide it shall be light?" " No," again responded Mr. Horne. " What was it then?" queried Mr. Greenland. " Well," said Mr. Horne, " I took as my text : ' He went out into the market-place about the *eleventh* hour and said, Go ye also into my vineyard'." Isn't that beautiful?

We cannot more fittingly close our reflections on this part of our theme than by making as our own, the prayer of the venerable and superlatively-gifted Canon Bernard, whose writings have enriched the Church of God for all time :

" While closing day leaves something still to do,
 Some deeper truth to learn, some gift to gain,
 Let me with cheerful mind my task pursue,
 And, thankful, glean the fragments that remain.

" From distant years if tearful memories rise,
 Dear scenes and faces known on earth no more,
 Unchanging Friend, to Thee I turn mine eyes,
 And all my sadness in Thy bosom pour.

" Draw nearer to me : let these days be blessed
 By thoughts familiar with the things to be ;
 And varying feelings find their perfect rest
 In one sweet hope—to be at Home with Thee."

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

PSALM 92. 14 :

" They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ANTICIPATIONS
OF THE
WELL-WORN TRAVELLER

WE have spoken of the grandeur of old age, and of its regrets, its joys, its perils, its limitations, its loneliness, and its opportunities. We are now to think, finally, of

ITS ANTICIPATIONS.

Scripture is reticent regarding much that we would like to know about our heavenly Home ; but enough is said to indicate that we shall find it to be a place of indescribable wonder, of unutterable blessedness, and of unspeakable peace.

Many think that the only way by which we can reach it is through the valley of the shadow, but that is not so. The New Testament uniformly teaches that, not death, but the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus is the event for which the Christian waits. In unforgettable words our Saviour affirmed this (John 14. 1-3) ; heavenly messengers confirmed His words (Acts 1. 9-11) ; and the Epistles are full of teaching about this soul-enthraling hope. When it shall be fulfilled, the dead in Christ shall be raised ; believers who are alive on the earth at the time shall be instantly changed, and, together with the dead in Christ, they shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall they ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4. 13-18). Although those for whom I am now writing may be old, and in some cases, perhaps, well-stricken in years, it is possible that

even they may not have to pass the vale of death, but that they shall meet Him in the air.

Whilst, however, death is not a certainty, it is a possibility ; and that fact has occasioned a good deal of misgiving, even among true-hearted believers in Christ. But the valley of the shadow, equally with the coming of our Lord for His own, is an avenue to God ; and, when it is realized that the words of farewell here are followed immediately by the words of welcome yonder—that, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5. 8), there is not the slightest cause for uncertainty or anxiety. An old lady, who lived in the south-east of Scotland, wanted very much to see the city of Edinburgh, but she could never make up her mind to take the railway journey, on account of the long tunnel through which she knew she would require to pass to get there. One day, however, circumstances arose which simply compelled her to take the train to Scotland's capital. For a while on the journey her fears were great, and, as the train sped on, her agitation increased. But before the tunnel was actually reached the dear old soul, worn out with worry, fell fast asleep ; *and when she eventually awoke she found that she was actually in the city !* It is even so with the dying saint. He closes his eyes on earth, passes into what he thinks of as the tunnel of death, and opens them immediately in the celestial land. Absent from the body, he is present with the Lord.

A very sick man asked his physician one day if he was likely to recover, and the doctor answered that, while it was quite possible, a second or a third attack, such as he had had, usually proved fatal. " Doctor," said the patient very earnestly, " I am afraid to die ;

tell me what lies on the other side." " I do not know," replied the medical man. " What," said the other, " you, a Christian man, and yet you do not know what is on the other side ! "

The doctor at this point, was holding the handle of the door, from the other side of which came sounds of scratching and whining. Opening the door, his big, lovely dog immediately bounded into the room, showing great delight at being once again in the presence of his master for whom he had been waiting outside. Turning to the patient, the doctor said : " Do you see this dog ? He has never been in this room before ; he didn't know what it was like inside. *But he knew his master was here* ; and when the door was opened he sprang in without fear." The speaker continued : " I know little of what lies on the other side of death ; but I *do* know that my Master is there ; and when He opens the door I shall pass in not only fearlessly but gladly."

Listen to this :

" I love to think of heaven ; its cloudless light,
 Its tearless joys, its recognitions and its fellowships
 Of love and joy unending. But when my soul anticipates
 The sight of God Incarnate, wearing on His hands,
 And feet, and side, the marks of the wounds
 Which He for us on Calvary endured,
 All heaven beside is swallowed up in this—
 And He, Who was my hope of Heaven below,
 Becomes the glory of my Heaven above."

Sometimes, before the end approaches, there is experienced on the part of some a reluctance to go ; but, as the hour draws very near, this unwillingness to depart is invariably replaced by an eagerness to get away. The biographers of Dr. Johnson tell us how,

when at length the moment, dreaded through so many years, came close, the dark cloud passed away from his mind ; his temper became unusually patient and gentle ; he ceased to think with terror of death, and spoke much of the mercy of God and of the propitiation of Christ.

Quite recently a celebrated author was honoured by English men of letters on his seventieth birthday. In the course of a speech which he made on that occasion, he recalled his feelings as a child, when his nurse would say to him : " Master Henry, it's your bedtime." A child usually protests when bedtime comes, but knows in his little head that sleep will sooner or later carry him off, and that what he very much needs is sleep. " Death," continued the speaker, " is a nurse, both affectionate and stern. When the time comes she says to us : ' Master Henry, it's your bedtime.' We protest a little ; but we know quite well that the time for rest has come, and that, in our hearts, we are longing for it."

Aaron (Num. 33. 38) and Moses (Deut. 34. 1-5) went up the hill, not down, at life's final close ; and, with God beside them, dropped their earthly garments, and stepped into endless life and glory. And, at the end of the day, we, too, shall lay aside these travel-worn garments of ours, and put on the new robes of immortality, exchanging bodily weakness and human frailty for the power and strength of an endless life. Are the eyes growing dim ? They shall see the King in His beauty. Are the ears becoming deaf ? They shall hear the music of the Shepherd's voice. Has life's fair beauty gone ? The beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon us. Has the voice lost its charm and sweetness ? " The ransomed of the Lord shall

return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." While, therefore, the earthly house of this tabernacle may crumble, the vision of the spirit may remain undimmed ; and my prayer for you, my comrades, as for myself, is that God in His kindness may :

“ Grant to life’s day a calm, unclouded ending,
An eve untouched by shadows of decay :
The brightness of a holy deathbed blending
With dawning glories of the eternal day.”

I dwell a little longer on this, because Scripture, and the experiences of many saints, seem clearly to indicate that we may expect it. For example, our Father assures us, in His everlasting Word, that we shall have

Light at Eventide.

“ It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light ” (Zech. 14. 7). That is to say light shall come at a time when it is not natural for it to come ; when, in the common course of things, it should not be expected. It would be no surprise that light should come at noonday ; but if, when the daisies have closed their eyes, and the little birds have gone to their nests ; if, when the twilight deepens, and a deep hush has come over all Nature, a sudden burst of noonday splendour were to spread around—that would be a surprise. And that is precisely what has happened to multitudes of the redeemed down through the long years.

Beulah Land

In his inimitable way John Bunyan has described this land which was the last halting-place of the

pilgrims on the hither side of the river. He speaks of it as a place where the sun shines by night and by day ; where the air is very sweet ; where the inhabitants continually hear the singing of birds, and see the flowers appear every day on the earth. Hear what that man of God, Dr. Payson, said before he passed to the Better Land : " Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which, for some weeks, I have been a happy inhabitant. The Celestial City is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odours are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but an insignificant rill that may be crossed at a single step whenever God shall give permission."

The Desired Haven

But what shall we say of the City itself? It is noticeable that, as it is impossible to describe the phenomena of one world in the phraseology of another, Heaven and our Inheritance are defined largely by negatives ; by terms which are the antitheses of those things with which we are so tragically familiar here. We are acquainted with pain, sorrow, tears, darkness, and death. Well, none of these things will be there. In that glad Home to which we are hastening, God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes ; " and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away " (Rev. 21. 4). And so, also, with the Inheritance : it is incorruptible—as to its substance ; undefiled—as to its purity ; unfading—as to its permanence (1 Peter 1. 3-5).

There are, however, in Revelation 22. 3-5, statements, both negative and positive, which indicate that it has a sevenfold perfection ; and I would have you meditate much on the sacred words which describe

THE FINAL HARMONY

1. There shall be no more curse : *Perfect sinlessness.*
2. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it :
Perfect government.
3. His servants shall serve Him : *Perfect service.*
4. And they shall see His face : *Perfect vision.*
5. His name shall be in their foreheads : *Perfect resemblance.*
6. There shall be no night there : *Perfect blessedness.*
7. They shall reign forever and forever : *Perfect glory.*

Let me quote for you now the exquisitely beautiful lines which John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, as the earthly house of his tabernacle began to crumble. There is pathos added to the first line of the fourth verse, when we remember that Whittier was never married.

AT LAST

- “ When on my day of life the night is falling,
And, in the winds from unsunned spaces blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown ;
- “ Thou Who hast made my house of life so pleasant—
Leave not its tenant when its walls decay ;
O Love Divine, O Helper ever present,
Be Thou my strength and stay !

" Be near me when all else is from me drifting,
 Earth, sky, home's pictures, days of shade and shine,
 And kindly faces to my own uplifting
 The love which answers mine.

" I have but Thee, my Father ! let Thy Spirit
 Be with me then to comfort and uphold ;
 No gate of pearl, no branch of palm I merit,
 Nor street of shining gold.

" Suffice it if—my good and ill unreckoned,
 And both forgiven through Thy abounding grace—
 I find myself by hands familiar beckoned
 Unto my fitting place—

" Some humble door among Thy many mansions,
 Some sheltering shade where sin and striving cease,
 And flows forever through Heaven's green expansions
 The river of Thy peace.

" There, from the music round about me stealing,
 I fain would learn the new and holy song,
 And find at last, beneath Thy trees of healing,
 The life for which I long."

It is difficult to tear oneself away from this entrancing theme ; but I must not tax your eyes much longer. I will, therefore, summarise a few of the other wonderful things which we may confidently anticipate.

When our glorious hopes are fulfilled, we shall have reached Home (John 14. 2) ; we shall uninterruptedly enjoy the companionship of our matchless Saviour (John 14. 3) ; we shall have perfect bodies (Phil. 3. 20, 21, R.V.) which are variously described as incorruptible (1 Cor. 15. 52) ; immortal (verse 53) ; spiritual (verse 44) ; glorious (Phil. 3. 21). We shall have a perfect environment : no sin to allure us, no unbelief to assail us, no sorrows to distress us ; for all that

occasions these things shall have for ever passed away (Rev. 22. 3). And because we shall be like Him (1 John 3. 2), we shall be fully and finally satisfied (Psalm 17. 15).

“ Far out of sight, while yet the flesh enfolds us,
Lies the fair country where our hopes abide ;
And of its bliss is naught more wondrous told us
Than these few words : ‘ I shall be satisfied ’.”

The message that comes to us from this chapter is contained in

ISAIAH 33. 17 :

“ Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty ; they shall behold the far-stretching land.”

EPILOGUE

AND now, for the present, good-bye. Whether we have to cross the "river" or shall be alive when our Saviour returns to gather His loved ones Home, matters little. Either way will be an avenue to God. We shall meet together in a Land unravaged by war—where the moan of broken men, and the tears of the widow and orphan, shall never be heard or seen, and where we shall be with our blessed Lord forever and forever. "What a day of rejoicing that will be!"

Meantime, I give you my truest wishes as these are expressed in the following old lines :

" THE LORD BLESS THEE "

" With the gladness that knoweth no decay,
With the riches that cannot pass away,
With the sunshine that makes an endless day,
Thus may He bless thee."

" AND KEEP THEE "

" With the all-covering shadow of His wings,
With the strong love that guards from evil things,
With the sure power that safe to glory brings,
Thus may He keep thee."