

**Faith's Stronghold ;**  
— OR —  
**The Blessedness of  
Sorrow.**

By P. WILLIS.



LONDON :  
THE CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT,  
12, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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FAITH'S STRONGHOLD ;  
OR,  
THE BLESSEDNESS OF  
SORROW.

*“ The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble ; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.”—NAHUM i. 7.*

IT is remarkable where these sentences come in. Storm, earthquake, and fury, as the judgments of God, seem to sweep all before them ; they have done so many a time in this world's history, and will do so again on a scale of greater magnificence and devastation than ever.

In the midst of this awful catastrophe and desolation, God's

voice is heard above the storm for the comfort of those who will listen and believe.

Six things must strike every careful reader in this verse :

- (1) SOVEREIGNTY ; (2) GOODNESS ;  
 (3) STRENGTH ; (4) TROUBLE ;  
 (5) KNOWLEDGE ; (6) FAITH.

### SOVEREIGNTY

is plainly implied in the title " Lord." He is sovereign in power and might. He controls the universe. None in heaven or earth can dispute it. None can say, " What doest thou ? " As Sovereign He is Lord of angels, fallen and unfallen. Demons and men of all conditions must do His bidding. All are merely servants under Him. " For His pleasure they were, and they have been created." " He turns the rivers into a wilderness, and the dry lands into springs of water." He can speak by

the fury of the terrible whirlwind, or in "the still small voice." By the gentleness of the still small voice He can make men tremble, and over-awe them into fear, and He can woo and win them, and calm their fears.

#### GOODNESS.

"HE IS GOOD." How well to know, that no matter what may be the stress and strain of circumstances, in all His ways with us He only works to make known His goodness. *NO ONE FEARS GOODNESS.* How that calms all our fears, and banishes them from our hearts.

When He asserts His sovereignty, sometimes for the moment we tremble. But when we learn that it is His goodness that bows our hearts, and breaks our stubborn wills, and makes us fear before

Him, what different thoughts take possession of our minds.

It enables us to welcome the storm, and kiss the rod ; which not only denote resignation, but the glad submission of our whole moral being to His most holy will.

When we learn that He who loves us is in the storm, and that He comes forth riding upon it in all His majesty and sovereign goodness, to bless us, we can truly say, " All is well." " Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face."

#### STRENGTH.

" A STRONGHOLD." Weakness is what marks us all. How few but feel they are weak—yes, weaker than a bruised reed, or as water spilt upon the ground. Every time we bend our knees in prayer, that is the expression of it ; it is a relief to so express it, it is the true and only secret of

realizing His almighty strength, which is made perfect in weakness.

A STRONGHOLD, or a strong, guarded fortress, supposes we are not out of the place of trouble and possible danger. We are in an enemy's country, where we are often made to feel his malicious power. If permitted, he would take great pleasure in giving us a thorn in the flesh; he would be very glad to raise a storm on any lake we crossed.

How well to have a STRONGHOLD—a well-guarded fortress—to turn into, where we are sure of perfect safety whatever may arise. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Prov. xviii. 10). "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me up upon a rock" (Ps. xxvii. 5).

Whatever may betide others when storms are raging, those are safe who are hidden in the STRONGHOLD where the sovereign power and goodness of the Lord are all put forth as a wall of fire, through which no shaft of the enemy can penetrate. He can easily still the proud waves of trouble, and say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." "IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US ?"

### TRouble.

"THE DAY OF TROUBLE." In one sense it is always a day of trouble. "These dark and evil days" have always been on the lips of Christians since my memory serves me. It was the same in Paul's day. It was the same in Luther's day. It was the same in Whitfield's. It is the same to-day.



Never a day that we have not trouble of various kinds. "No day without its arrow, no night without its noisome pestilence, no rose without its thorn." The loving mother has her daily trouble with her children. Though she deeply loves them, never a day that her spirits are not troubled about some little things. The father has the same; the business man the same.

The poor have the very real trouble of being hard-pinched. The rich have the trouble of not knowing what to do with their riches, and keeping securely against disaster their principal. "Adversity slays her thousands—prosperity her tens of thousands."

Nevertheless, there are special times of trouble in every life and every circle. There are times when both the mental, physical, and spiritual nerves are strained to the

uttermost, and the heart either beats too fast or too slow.

The health of the dear and loving father gives way, or the fond mother sinks down in death. The darling child, who seemed the light and joy of the whole household, dies most unexpectedly. A turn in the wheel of fortune in the business comes, and retrenchment must take place all round, or bankruptcy will ensue. Some one lets out a calumnious report, which soon goes whispered around from one to another, and the tender, sensitive nature is stung to the very quick. You may not have learned the secret of "live it down," and you allow the report to break some very mutual and tender friendships. You have forgotten that *a slander uttered injures the slanderer much more than the slandered*. You may have forgotten also that as a rule no one can injure you

eventually but the man between the scalp and the heel—YOURSELF. Our Lord was slandered, yet He committed His cause to Him that judges righteously.

All trouble is the result of sin. While sin is here trouble will be here. We cannot escape it. If we did not know trouble, we should never need comfort. We could never learn God as the God of all comfort. We could never be used to sympathize with and comfort others in their troubles, because we had not gone through the experience that needed comfort.

Many have said, "It was worth while passing through trouble to get the comfort of God's special presence and sympathy and support." It shows us what special objects we are of His care and loving interest. We have learned Him, in our trouble, as a true and tender-hearted Friend. "He nothing does nor suffers to be

done, but if we knew the reason we would do the same." "God is behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes He is behind. What He does not rule He over-rules."

### KNOWLEDGE.

"HE KNOWETH THEM." How very touchingly this is worded. "He knoweth them that trust in Him." Does He not know everything? Of course He does. From the crawling worm to the angels' flight, nothing escapes the vigilance of His searching eye. "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" *It is the knowledge special to secret intimacy.* It is like that other word, "Thou hast known my soul in adversity." He makes you feel at the trying moment that your case is peculiar, as if you were a favourite.

People in trouble have often said, "Nobody knows me," meaning no

one seems to understand my special case or circumstances. Misunderstanding has often brought a sensitive nature into depths of despair and isolation.

There are times in every history when we find out that all men are liars, when lover and friend are put far from us. The cruel fangs with the venom of the serpent of betrayal or denial may have stung us, and we find the smart is difficult to heal.

But there is One who knows us through and through, and understands our uprising and downsitteing ; at such moments we can say, " Thou hast searched me, and KNOWN ME."

When the cold biting east winds of adversity blow upon us, it is then we learn His special knowledge of our case. He never denies us nor yet betrays our secrets ; He tells us our faults to our face, and covers all our failures and sins from the

eyes of others. Nothing proves true friendship more than this. When Peter looked up into His blessed face, as His tender searching eye looked into Peter's heart, all Peter could say was, "*THOU KNOWEST* all things, *THOU KNOWEST* that I love Thee."

How very much is wrapped up in these appealing words from Peter's broken heart. "*THOU KNOWEST.*" The others might be speaking against Peter, and wondering, after all he had said and done, if he were a true disciple ; but he himself says, whatever others may think or say, "*THOU KNOWEST* all things, *THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE.*"

#### FAITH.

"*TRUST IN HIM.*" Faith implies confidence, trust, and knowledge. We must know the person we confide and trust in. If there were

no storms and stress, there were no need for FAITH. FAITH is like the Alpine plant that grows fastest in the storm. FAITH will not be needed in heaven, because all will be the eternal haven of calm and sunshine there. FAITH will give place to sight, and actual realization.

FAITH is the substantiating, or making real, to us the things we have never seen. It is in the power of FAITH we bring the brightness of heavenly things into the present, day by day, and live in the enjoyment of them as if we were in the actual realization of them.

No difficulty is too great for FAITH. It can surmount every obstacle that would come in to obscure its vision. It can meet a lion in all the majesty of his power, and stop his mouth, or endure banishment, torture, fire or sword. It laughs at impossibilities ; it has

ever done so, and is doing so to-day. It can feed its thousands of orphans daily, or cheerfully starve in a garret and say, "Poor ! I am not poor ; I have Christ ; what want I more ? " " These *ALL* died in *FAITH*."

Difficulties are the daily food and nourishment of FAITH. The path of FAITH is a path interwoven with entanglements, while FAITH does not despise but recognizes the difficulties, surmounts them as on eagle's wing, and soars aloft on its mighty pinions to the God who creates. *He never disappoints the desire He creates.*

The billows may arise, and the breakers of trouble may at times threaten to engulf our little barque, in which the dear Master of the storm lies fast asleep, but FAITH is still and peaceful. When the thunders roar, and the lightnings flash, and the earthquake of trouble rocks



and shakes all that man counts stable and secure, FAITH is brightest because it rests in the knowledge that God is behind the scenes, moving all for His own glory and our present and eternal good.

“ Say not, my soul, ‘ From whence can  
God relieve my care ? ’

Omnipotence hath servants every-  
where.

His method is sublime, His way  
supremely kind,

God never is before His time, and  
never is behind.”

Such language is the sheet-anchor of FAITH at all times. When God is brought in, all difficulties vanish ; no difficulty is too great for God. FAITH puts God in His true place, and puts the creature in his. We find as we are daily dependent on God we realize our greatest blessedness.

Though our dependence may be tested by being kept waiting, *the*

*waiting will do us good* ; it helps to purify our motives, and purify our lives. The testing only brightens FAITH, like a soldier burnishing his sword. Well might the Psalmist, who had very much experience, say, "It is better to TRUST in the Lord, than put confidence in princes." "Blessed are all they that trust in Him." If we are not happy, we are not trusting.

TRUSTFULNESS ALWAYS BRINGS  
HAPPINESS.

## SUFFERING.

THE gospel of suffering and the discipline of pain have often been spoken about ; perhaps they are the greatest purifiers and moral elevators in the universe.

We all resist suffering, and we do not like to bear pain, from whatever cause it may arise : yet it is needful for the development of the noblest spiritual graces.

If we would be purified from the pollutions of this world, and walk in moral elevation outside its defiling influence, we must not be disappointed if we suffer in some way.

It has been said, that " Every great thought is born of human suffering." Besides being needful for the fullest development of spiritual grace in us, it is a needful and wholesome check upon the flesh, the lust and pride of our hearts.

Each life fragrant of Christ that we see is the result of pain and sorrow. Every pearl, costly in its own intrinsic beauty, is the result of suffering inflicted by the sand, the contrary element in the oyster which produces the pearl.

God could easily have hindered sin, which has caused all the human suffering. But had sin been disallowed, what moral triumphs would ever have been witnessed by the power of Divine Grace, which has come into the midst of this sin-laden and sin-stained world ?

None ! There would have been no room nor need for grace. A world of innocents would never have required discipline, nor needed the education of which that discipline is such a great and grand producer.

If we are led to look at things in this light, it will greatly help to alleviate all our trials. It will

fortify us against irritability, and help us to be patient ; for patience is the greatest mark of moral force in the midst of suffering.

Grace, than which there is nothing more beautiful before the eye of God, will not be hindered from shining out through our mortal bodies. All will see the greatness of the light, which is Divine, and not from a human source.

The patience witnessed in us may, like a great beacon light, help to cheer many a tried spiritual mariner as he battles with the storm, both within and around, and save him from getting under the power of despair, or dashing his frail barque against the rocks of doubt and destruction.

As a rule it is not so much the highly gifted that encourage us, as the patient, calm, and uncomplaining sufferer. None can escape suffer-

ing in this world of sin and moral disorder. *Better to suffer in the company of Christ, than suffer as the fruit of our self-will and folly.*

The gentle, sweet face, as the result of the sufferer lying on her back for long weary months, or perhaps years, has often spoken to us more loudly than the most powerful discourse to which we ever listened. The patient spirit has oftentimes rebuked our impatience. Little do such know the influence they have exercised over those who visit them !

We have heard of a paralytic of high birth, who had suffered many long weary years, who said,—

“ A shattered wreck am I,  
Enjoying but a chair.  
I sit and sing the whole day long,  
To Him who placed me there ;  
Content a shattered wreck to be,  
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.”

How we have often been rebuked for our unthankfulness as we have pondered over these lines! We seem to take the long years of a sound mind, and a healthy, vigorous body, as if they were ours by right, and not as a gift in the sovereign mercy of God.

“Did you ever thank God for your reason?” was the question addressed by a man in the grounds of an insane asylum to a brother in the Lord. This is something to think about, and not a little to be thankful for.

“If we are irritable, we are not thankful,” said one well known. And also, “Contentment is a great element of happiness.” *CONTENTMENT* when things and circumstances are all in our favour is one thing. But *CONTENTMENT* when the shining sun of fortune has gone down, and all seems against us, is quite another.

THANKFULNESS when the barns are filled with plenty, when the children are all well, and the banking account on the credit side, is comparatively simple. But THANKFULNESS when there is no meat in the field, nor herd in the stalls, and no bread in the cupboard, is a rare Christian grace. Notwithstanding the loss of all, an Old Testament saint said, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

The Hebrews were enjoined to be CONTENT with such things as they had. They had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods in the warmth of their love to the Lord. They had also endured a great fight of afflictions. They shared the companionship of those whom their countrymen had ill-used.

Yet we see the danger that threatened them was to get faint,



and grow weary, in the midst of the continued strain brought about by suffering. If they did not grow disconsolate, faint, or weary, their danger arose from the opposite extreme—to despise it, and not to profit morally by it, and thus be partakers of God's holiness. They ought to have taken it all from the Holy Father's love—the deepest and truest love for them.

Every inducement to continue in the suffering path of faith that the noble mind of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews could offer, he holds out to them. He lifts aloft and waves the flag of victory in the face of the enemy, by unrolling the long list of noble names of their suffering ancestors. Like a gallant captain who does not go behind, or even beside his army, but right in front, he says, "Come on ! Follow me ! All is well !" "These

all died IN FAITH, not having received the promises."

"We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom." It is a Kingdom of suffering at present, not a Kingdom of power and glory. It is therefore a Kingdom of patience. Take it all from the Father's hand who loves us. Though it be not pleasant to bear at the moment, it will afterward work the peaceable fruits of righteousness. You will find *LIFE*—peace—and joy—as the result. "Be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and *LIVE*."

LIFE, in a practical way, is found in the enjoyment of the Father's love. The Lord Jesus said, "The Father Himself loveth you." His love does not allow us to escape suffering. His wisdom either ordains or permits it, for us to prove His love to us in it. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

All the trials of their faith from their fellow-countrymen were incidental to the path they entered by receiving a rejected Christ, whom their leaders had set at nought.

Had they entered into that side—the side of having fellowship with Him in His suffering pathway, He would have poured into their hearts the rich consolations of His love as compensation. There is no greater compensation possible than the comfort of His love. It sweetens every bitter cup. It is like the tree thrown into the bitter waters.

“As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” This means, that the measure in which we walk in subjection to the Spirit (who makes intercession within us, with groanings which cannot be uttered), in full sympathy with the life of Christ in us, in the midst of a

groaning creation, and accept the suffering pathway as the sufferings of Christ, so will our comfort or joy abound and be full.

Is it any wonder that many saints are not happy when they allow the will of the flesh to work, and resent the sufferings incidental to the pathway of a rejected Christ, who had not where to lay His weary Head in the midst of His own possessions ?

HAPPINESS apart from the sweet companionship of the Christ in His suffering pathway there cannot be ! Thank God that it is so ! Real happiness in His company, in such a pathway, there is most truly ! I need hardly say not in His atoning sufferings, but His sufferings as MAN, faithful to and for God on earth. He was ever the FAITHFUL and TRUE WITNESS, which exposed Him to man's hatred. Besides being holy in nature, He suffered in the

midst of the corruption and unholiness of all around Him. Being in the presence of sin, and seeing every day its awful effects, must have been dreadful to His holy, loving mind.

He was never defiled by it, thank God! He could not be defiled by sin. He abhorred it, and therefore shrank from it in its most enticing forms. Having received His life and nature, we must as a consequence—in the measure in which we live in the power of that life and nature—suffer as He did.

“ARM YOURSELVES LIKEWISE with the same mind.” Such armour will preserve us. The same holy, suffering, lowly mind will make us invulnerable against the subtleties of Satan, and will enable us to triumph and overcome, as He triumphed and overcame. Thus shall we not grow weary or be defeated.

Thy cup was filled, blest Lord, below,  
Thy Father's love sustained through  
    woe;

The Father's will was Thy delight,  
His glory never from Thy sight.

Thy joy shall be fulfilled in all  
    Who willingly obey Thy call;  
Who tread Thy path while here below,  
And patient in Thy footsteps go.

Oh, draw us, Saviour, after Thee,  
Faithful and loyal our hearts would  
    be;

Keep us, O Lord, with heaven in view,  
Constrained by love, and ever true.

As pilgrims here, and strangers too,  
We'd hasten on until anew  
We drink for ever of Thy Grace,  
In glory see Thee face to face.

PHILIP WILLIS.

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