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IN THE  
Shadows of the Valley

BY  
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TO THOSE WHO MOURN  
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED  
WITH LOVING SYMPATHY





## Light in the Shadows of the Valley

None can pass into the midnight darkness of the valley, where sorrow whelms the soul and come forth unchanged. The valley of sorrow is a crucible. It is also a school where lessons are to be learned. Those who enter become pupils in sorrow's school; and the attitude and aptitude of the pupil will determine the value and meaning of the lessons.

And the teacher in this school? Only He can sit as Teacher who was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. Not only is Jesus our teacher, but those who enter the valley of sorrow have been assured that He will be with them to comfort, to strengthen, to deliver and to bless.

And the lessons to be learned? These lessons may not always be the same for all who become pupils in this school. I do not presume in

what follows that I speak of the universal lessons to be learned by those who know the shadows which o'erhang the valley of sorrow. Nevertheless, I speak not as a theorist. In these few lines in which I seek to offer comfort and help to those who mourn, God knows I speak not in mere platitudes. To the reader I want only to open a bruised heart, and to mention in simple and unpretentious words what lessons came to my own life in the days when the midnight darkness of the valley dazed and blinded and whelmed my soul; in a day when the tenderest lamb of my own little flock was taken from our arms and borne away to the bosom of the Heavenly Shepherd. These have been the hardest lessons of life. They have been lessons from Gethsemane's garden; and I mention them publicly with the one hope that they may prove a tender, precious ministry of comfort and healing. If the personal element seems at times to obtrude unduly it will be understood that the writer is talking out of his own heart and therefore must speak in the first person.

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I realized as not before the frailty and futility of human knowledge and power in the extreme experiences of life. As we look about us and behold the marvelous and ever-increasing accomplishments of man, we are almost ready to pronounce him the inheritor of Divine possibilities. There seems no limit to his ability to know and to do. Everywhere and every day man seems to be doing the impossible, surmounting the insurmountable, conquering the unconquerable. Human knowledge and power appear, at times, to have passed finite bounds.

And yet when we come to the supreme test, the preservation of a life, a life tender, sweet, pure, a life strong, virile, promising, a life noble, consecrated, fruitful, and for whose preservation love, money, sacrifice, even blood, would be poured without measure; human knowledge and power, as manifested in their most skilful exponents; stand in silent weakness confessing utter helplessness. In a week, in a day, in an hour human ability reaches its utmost limit, and we fall back broken, awed, helpless. At a glance

we see the whole boundary of the finite, that boundary which oftentimes seems to have no horizon. Then do our human limitations bound us round like mountains bleak and cold. And the Infinite, how far-reaching, how immeasurable it appears! How we long to bring our dazed and darkened minds into the light and life of the Father of all wisdom! How we yearn to have God come in unto us with his wisdom and light, and just teach and empower and do for us what we cannot do for ourselves! How we realize the absolute necessity of a close and constant dependence of our frail, human lives upon the Infinite Father! In this hour, when we realize the futility and frailty of human power and knowledge, we lift up our hearts for the touch of the wisdom and power that are Divine.

The ultimate worthlessness and insecurity of earth's possessions is another lesson that emphasized itself. The words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount proclaim a new sound in our ears, a new meaning in our hearts. We begin to understand the lesson in the "grass of the field

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which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven". Meaningful indeed are Christ's words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal".

In that hour when the angel of death visits unbidden the home circle, and with little warning and against our strongest defense carries away our loved one, of what value are all the treasures and possessions of earth; if we have not sought first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness? In that hour what are all this world's goods to me, if I have not faith and hope and love, and above all, Jesus Christ? The investments I have made in Christ, through faith, now return unto me a thousandfold, while no investment I may have in this world's wealth can return unto me the first comfort, or help, or hope. In that hour when my soul tasted its bitterest experience, cried out in its deepest agony, sensed

its greatest weakness and craved with unutterable anguish a help from somewhere, from someone, what did the world have to offer? Well, one may not be assured of all the world has to offer, but one thing with me was certain, all that the world did offer appeared as vanity. And I realized also that whatever the world might offer was unreliable and insecure, feeling it might be taken away in the next hour, just as the loved one had been snatched away in the present hour. We find a new value and comfort in those words of Paul, "Look not upon the things which are seen, but upon the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal". We come to appreciate the values and the treasures which are laid up in heaven against the rust, the moth and the thief. In the valley of sorrow these treasures in heaven are unspeakably precious. Naught is so full of comfort in the day by the river when the loved one of our bosom slips from our arms into the arms of the blessed Savior.

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I learned also the lesson that in earth's experiences there lurks a seed of sorrow in every joy. When two lives stand at the marriage altar and plight a mutual troth a new and gracious joy is kindled. When into that newly established home a welcome little one comes another and sweeter joy abounds. But in each of these experiences of joy a seed of sorrow lies. The seed may be hidden, to be sure, but conditions will arise under which the seed will germinate and in its fruitage turn our deepest joy into a yet deeper sorrow. The coming of the angel of love at the marriage altar, and of the angel of life into the birth-chamber make possible the coming of the angel of death and sorrow into that same home circle. This is one of the many instances in which the experience of joy carries with it the seed of a probable sorrow. And so frequently does this occur that we may pronounce it a law in our lives. This may be called the dark side of joy, or, may I say, it constitutes the price of our joy.

However, there came into my life another

and kindred thought. It is this. As every joy contains the seed of a probable sorrow, so the sorrow of the valley contains the seed of a joy sweeter and more precious than any yet known. But this is true only for those of the household of faith, for those whose hope is in Christ. Through Jesus and his resurrection there comes to us the assurance that the night of sorrow will be followed with the morning of joy. "Sorrow continueth through the night, but joy cometh in the morning." The believer in Christ looks forward to the dawning of that morning in which the seed of joy shall come to its fruition; when the morning light shall usher in a day upon which the shadows of evening darkness shall never fall. Then it may be we will be "very glad that for a little while we were so sad".

The consciousness of God's almighty and everlasting arms bearing and sustaining me was probably the most precious lesson learned in the school of sorrow. Unseen arms are they; but how wondrously real! Often had I spoken to friends in sorrow of God's sustaining comfort



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and grace, and in my weak ministry I believed the words I uttered. But I never KNEW the truth of that promise until I felt the loving arms of the Father bearing and sustaining my own life bruised and broken. Then did I learn that the Savior made it possible for me to bear what I had always felt I could never endure. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee" was a promise that found wonderful fulfillment. And I am convinced that this is a promise the Lord Jehovah will consciously fulfill unto any and all who rest their trust in Him. God does become a real helper, and his arms become as real and precious as the arms of a mother to her grief-stricken child. Dear friend, in thy sorrow, take God at his word, give him his opportunity, and he will prove his faithfulness unto you. He will not disappoint you. The unseen Father never became so consciously and truly a loving heavenly Father as in the valley of my deepest sorrow.

Another truth that came home to me with new force, if not for the first time, was this: it

requires an infinite experience to understand the infinite heart and love of our Heavenly Father. The saying that experience is our best teacher is never too old to repeat. And it is likewise true that experience teaches most to him who also suffers most. So universally true is this that one may well say, to learn is to suffer. The choicest pearls are found only in the deepest waters. The prodigal never appreciated the wonderful love of his father's heart until, through the heroism of repentance, he came back from the swineherd. He may have believed in his father's goodness when he divided unto him his own living, but not until in rags and hunger, his sin and shame burning out his very life, he came home to a forgiving father, did he know the fullness of his father's love. Mary and Martha knew Jesus loved them else they would not have sent messengers to him announcing the sickness of Lazarus, but they only sensed the greatness of that love and the sympathy of their Master when he gave back unto them the mourned brother. It was in the infinite experience of sorrow that the

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fullness of love became known. If the heart be tender toward the Divine Spirit in the hour of deepest sorrow the infinite tenderness of the Father's heart will be felt and known as not before. It is really an opportunity to know God.

It would seem also that a new estimate of the value and preciousness of faith must come home to the life enshrouded in darkness. In my own experience it was a time when faith made real the cherished hopes of a Christian's heart. Faith "actualized" what hope had "visualized". It was an hour when faith substantiated the unseen verities of hope. I then learned how faith lifts up the life to the heights and gives vision to tear-stained eyes, how faith lifts up above the clouds and permits us to behold the real things, even the sure comforts of God. Then did I learn that of all things faith is fundamental, faith is worth while.

The words of Peter beat with a new meaning, as he speaks of being "put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it

is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Under the shadow of a whelming sorrow faith is changed. It cannot remain neutral while the heart bleeds. Either it must, recovering from the shock, quicken and strengthen, or weaken and die. In this hour we may well ask the Master to do for us what He did for Peter in the day of his great trial. You recall the assuring words of Jesus, “But Peter I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.”

I discovered that a great sorrow is, in itself, an evil. It is a curse save as our Heavenly Father turns it into a blessing. That our God can and will turn the evil of our sorrow and suffering into a blessing, if only we permit Him, is a lesson that can be learned alone in the valley. There is no good in the pruning unless the tree bears a larger and sweeter fruitage. The crucible finds its reason in the purifying of the metal, in bringing it into its highest possible usefulness. In passing through the valley the suffering is so bitter as to have no savor unless it becomes

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God's opportunity to clarify vision, to enrich faith, to assure hope and to make heaven more real. Such an hour is God's opportunity, and one will readily learn how graciously the Father uses it when the stricken soul casts itself upon Him, praying that He shall in some way do what seems impossible. We can only look to Him as a Friend and Comforter, for death, the enemy, has laid us in the dust.

In the first hours in sorrow's valley one sees only evil, darkness, despair. The sun has ceased to give his light; the Lord has stopped his ears unto our cry, the light of our life has gone out. Thus it seems, and with much reason. And thus it must ever be were it not that our Father in heaven speaks to us. Only as He, with gentle touch and loving wisdom, begins to fashion light out of darkness, hope out of despair, strength out of weakness, and gives to us revelations of Himself and assurances of our Heavenly Home, do we learn this lesson. And oh what a comfort is here. Just to know that God has not forgotten, that He does not regard our suffer-

ing with indifference, that with swiftness He comes alongside to help. God will turn the valley of our sorrow into the Gerizim of blessing.

Among the most needful lessons learned in this deepest experience of my life was this, we cannot weep with others until first we have wept alone. We may have thought differently. We may have thought we entered into the afflictions of others. But in the hour of our midnight darkness we learn that we have only wept FOR our sorrowing friends. We have not wept WITH them because we could not. We have been willing, but now we learn that willingness does not determine ability. Never before did I realize the meaning of those descriptive words about my Savior, "He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". As not before I knew Him to be a "Great High Priest, touched with the feeling of my infirmities". Thus are we enabled the better to go forth to comfort others with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. The price paid for the lesson learned is greater than we would choose,

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but we must feel and find ourselves prepared and sent forth unto a truer ministry. Yes, the price paid is terrible, but I am comforted in the thought that my Heavenly Father knows all this, even the agony and the bleeding, and I rejoice in being permitted to look to Him to fashion my life into a more helpful ministry, wherein I may bind up the broken-hearted with hands of tenderest love.

I may say advisedly that the one thing which loomed largest in the meditation of those hours was the eternal WHY. I presume that this experience is universal. There is never a time when we want to know so much and seem to know so little. And it is the time when we learn we must walk by faith, not by sight. We learn the lesson, and none is more valuable to the Christian, that such knowledge as we crave, if it comes to us, must be the fruit of faith. Faith is the heart with which we feel, the eyes with which we see, the ears with which we hear, the feet with which we walk. Faith alone can help us to approach the eternal WHY.

But we do not find an immediate answer to our query. We may never find a satisfying answer during the pilgrimage here. And yet the thought looms larger and larger, and brings increasing comfort, that in heaven the Father will answer this eternal question, and that in his answer we will find the love and wisdom of our God resting behind the permission of our sorrow. This comforting assurance did come to my own life, and faith was the door through which it entered. Let us not mistake in this matter. Seeing will not bring this comfort, nor mourning, nor rebellion, nor reason, but faith; and faith WILL bring it and help wonderfully to answer the eternal WHY which presses so hard in the valley of sorrow. Let us remember that our Lord is ever greater than any interrogation point that may arise in our path.

A last lesson to be noted relates itself to the one just mentioned. Although the eternal WHY looms large in the valley of our affliction, and we crave above all things its answer, nevertheless we come to thank God for the wisdom



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and providence which hide from us what a day may bring forth. Often the soul cries out, "If only I had known"! And it would seem well, even best, if at times we could see ahead. Our conduct might be altered, as our thinking and our plans. But the omniscience which would reveal to us the things of tomorrow is the omniscience which would lay at the very threshold of life every experience and sorrow of all the passing years. And who of us could endure this burden? Such a burden of omniscience imposed upon man would make suicides of the human race. As never before did I realize that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof". I came to thank my Heavenly Father with true gratitude that He permits us to live a day at a time, and with the day assures us with the promise "as thy day is, so shall thy strength be". No, we cannot afford to ask God to reveal to us the future. We may better pray that He give us grace according to the need of the future, and this He has promised to do.

Cardinal Newman must have had a like

vision when he gave to the Christian world those beautiful lines,

“Lead kindly Light! amid the encircling gloom.

Lead thou me on.

The night is dark, and I am far from home.

Lead thou me on.

Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see

The distant scene, one step enough for me.”

It is quite true that had I known my little daughter was to be taken away from us just when she was, and in a day as it were, I would not have been absent from her for the two months immediately preceding. But had I known this two months in advance I must have known it also for the more than five years of her beautiful life with us,—and what parent could have endured such fore-knowledge? Beloved in sorrow, God has manifested a gracious providence toward us in that He has broken our years into days and asked us to live a day at a time, granting a fresh supply of grace for each succeeding day.

In closing these lines I beg indulgence for a word aside. In the day when our path leads

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through the valley of the shadows we must not chastise ourselves if we find the spirit of resignation coming slowly. We cannot secure our adjustment in a day. We may be willing in spirit, and yet our human resignation can come only through pain and labor. The flesh is always weak in the great emergencies. Time is required. Our hearts are so constituted that they must bleed when broken, and the binding up and healing requires time. Although we have given ourselves completely into the hands of the Great Physician we cannot be healed in a day. Do not chastise yourself or doubt your faith, I urge, if you recover slowly from the awful shock. The patience of faith must have its perfect work. How well the Master must understand and appreciate this! Jesus knows how much time is required for each one, and He will be patient and loving through all the days.







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