

SHOWERS UPON THE GRASS

A companion volume to As the Small Rain

by

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CHAPTER SIX

“OH HOW GREAT IS THY GOODNESS”

“REJOICE EVERMORE”

Genuine piety is never long-faced. Sin makes men unhappy; religious pride and egotism may make them miser able; but God’s grace brings joy and happiness.

Some people seem to feel that an unhappy countenance or a mournful expression indicates spirituality and righteousness. God’s Word indicates that the contrary is true. A Christian has every reason for rejoicing. God’s way is a way of joy. Indeed, the only place that full and abundant happiness is found is in the proper relationship with God.

The Psalmist wrote: “**In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore**” (Psalm 16:11). Christians are commanded to rejoice, and it is a command that it is no effort to obey. “**Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice**” (Philippians 4:4). “**Rejoice evermore**” (I Thessalonians 5:16). This is God’s injunction to His children. Christ declared: “**I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly**” (John 10:10). Surely no abundance of life is possible unless there is peace and happiness in the heart.

After all, the Christian has every reason for rejoicing. His sins have been forgiven. He no longer has to carry a burden of guilt. Having met God’s conditions, he has the divine promise that his sins will be remembered against him no more forever (Hebrews 8:12). He has constant companionship of God Himself. The Spirit of God which in dwells him bears witness with his spirit that he is a child of God and assures him of constant guidance and comfort. In time of sorrow—sorrows come, of course, to all men—he has the promise, “**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee**” (Hebrews 13:5); and his Saviour, who was “**a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief**” (Isaiah 53:3), enters into the fellowship of his suffering and brings, in the time of sadness, the light of His presence and the blessing which comes from knowing that God Himself carries the burden of sorrow for us.

He has power to resist temptation. “**Greater is he that is in you,**” the Bible declares to the saved man, “**than he that is in the world**” (I John 4:4).

Whatever may come of affliction, of war, of disappointment, has over it the gleam of this promise; and all the storms of life are brightened by the rainbow of the Christian hope.

Even death itself holds no terrors, “**For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**” (II Corinthians 5:1). We are assured that because he lives, we shall live also (John 14:19). The grave may be dark, but beyond it is the glory of resurrection and the promise of an heavenly home where “**God shall wipe away all tears . . .**” (Revelation 21:4) from the eyes of men, where there is no sorrow or sighing, where nothing shall ever enter that mars and blights and destroys.

Indeed, perhaps after all, the Christian should be long-faced; but he should be long-faced east and west, not north and south. It should be a smile and not a frown which lengthens the countenance of God’s child. What a pity that sinful men and women, seeking in the world for satisfaction and pleasure, do not realize that the only true joy and the only lasting happiness are found in Christ.

Never, dear Lord, let me give sparingly
Of what I have; if it be joy, I pray,
Help me to share it gladly—tenderly—
As Thou would’st have me—always; if some day
I chance upon a spark of loveliness
May I not selfishly quench all its fire,
By hoarding it, but may it live to bless
Someone nearby; this would be my desire:

To give of love all that I have—and more—
If that could be—to borrow joy and lend
It out again—to keep an open door,
Without a lock upon my heart, that friend,
Ah, yes! and foe—might find some needed guide
Within. Tonight I think of Calvary;
Thou didst give all—Thy life—Thy love—and died—
Never, dear Lord, let me give sparingly.

— Ruth M. Gibbs

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“PLENTY OF SILVER”

The truth that human nature never changes is plainly evidenced in the Bible. The reader will find such strikingly “modern logic” in the book of Job that he will almost imagine someone of his neighbors speaking it. Job’s friends sitting with him on the ash heap and attempting to offer him the comfort of their own poor philosophy have many brothers alive today.

Their language may be oriental and picturesque as compared to the modern, prosaic phrases of our twentieth century, but the thought is so often the same. Listen to Eliphaz, one of the **“comforters”**: **“Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto them . . . Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defense, and thou shalt have plenty of silver”** (Job 22:21, 25). In good sound modern English, we hear it expressed so often thus, “It pays to be religious.”

While it is true that it is better to be decent than immoral, upright than dishonest, that which was untrue in Eliphaz’s day is still untrue now. God does not promise great wealth, or in Eliphaz’s words **“plenty of silver,”** to the righteous any more than He promises poverty to the unrighteous. In fact, we are told not to be **“envious against the workers of iniquity.”** Plenty of money sometimes comes to a man who is a crook and a rascal, and there is many a child of God who has little enough of this world’s goods. God’s promise is:

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

God does not promise **“plenty of silver.”** He does promise that all needful things shall be supplied. **“A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”** (Luke 12:15). Neither is a mere accumulation of temporal possessions an indication of the fullness of one’s life.

Eliphaz’s reasoning was unsound, for he himself had but a poor acquaintanceship with God and his idea of peace was confined to tranquility in one’s environment, with plenty to eat and plenty to drink and silver to spend.

Though troubles assail, and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail, and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The promise assures us, “The Lord will provide.”

The birds, without barn or storehouse, are fed;
From them let us learn to trust for our bread:
His saints what is fitting shall ne’er be denied,
So long as ‘tis written, “The Lord will provide.”

No strength of our own, nor goodness we claim;
Our trust is all thrown on Jesus’ name:
In this our strong tower for safety we hide;
The Lord is our power, “The Lord will provide.”

When life sinks apace, and death is in view,
The word of His grace shall comfort us through:
Not fearing or doubting, with Christ on our side,
We hope to die shouting, “The Lord will provide.”

— John Newton

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OMNIPOTENT FORCES

Everyone who knows anything about the Bible recognizes that it not only contains God's commandments to men, but that it is also full of advice and good examples. Yet men who are so quick to break the laws and violate the commandments are slow to heed the advice and follow the good examples.

Speaking of examples, Hezekiah set one for us. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, had sent threatening letters to Hezekiah. Sennacherib was a powerful monarch with strong armies; Hezekiah's kingdom was relatively weak. Hezekiah did a wise thing. He took the letter into the presence of the Lord, spread it out before Him and appealed to Him to solve the problem (Isaiah 37:14). Hezekiah felt a divine assurance that the Lord was interested in the matter since the threatened kingdom was the kingdom of His people and he knew that Judah's only hope lay in the power of God.

If we have by faith identified ourselves with the Lord, and if we are willing to bear the reproach of His name before men, everything that touches us is a matter of interest to God. We have a right, then, to believe that He is willing to solve the problem. That He is able to do so should be evident, for He upholds all things by the Word of His power, and He who is the Lord of heaven and earth can certainly surmount the difficulties which confront us. Why should we not, then, follow Hezekiah's example and lay our problems before Him?

Hezekiah's prayer over the open letter from Sennacherib set omnipotent forces at work. The result of that prayer was revealed days later when the citizens of Jerusalem found Sennacherib's army dead. God heard Hezekiah and sent the angel of death in the night to smite His enemies where they lay, and **“the might of the Gentile . . . melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.”**

One man prayed: God slew an army. Hezekiah trusted and Jerusalem was saved.

Light of the world! whose kind and gentle care
Is joy and rest;
Whose counsels and commands so gracious are,
Wisest and best,—
Shine on my path, dear Lord, and guard the way,
Lest my poor heart, forgetting, go astray.

Lord of my life! my soul's most pure desire,
Its hope and peace;
Let not the faith Thy loving words inspire
Falter, or cease; But be to me, true Friend, my chief delight,
And safely guide, that every step be right.

My blessed Lord! what bliss to feel Thee near,
Faithful and true;
To trust in Thee, without one doubt or fear,
Thy will to do;
And all the while to know that Thou, our Friend,
Art blessing us, and wilt bless to the end.

— Henry Bateman

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THE FALLEN GREAT

“**In the days of Herod the king . . .**” Matthew tells us, “**Jesus was born . . .**” (Matthew 2:1).

Thus the name of the king is mentioned, but mentioned in connection with the coming of God’s Son. No doubt Herod felt very important. After all, was he not king? Was he not a great personage whom men delighted to honor? Was he not a friend of the great Caesar himself? What was more natural than that things should be dated by the year of his reign?

But this One who was born had been from the beginning the very God Himself. The prophet Micah had said: “**But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting**” (Micah 5:2). So “**in the days of Herod the king . . .**” there came forth the One whose goings forth had been from everlasting.

Herod is chiefly known as the king who happened to be on the throne at the time of the birth of Christ. His place in history is due entirely to the fact that he was the king who sought for the Infant to kill Him and the one to whom the wise men came saying, “**Where is he that is born King of the Jews?**”

Men have their little day, statesmen, and sages, and popular demagogues; they strut across the stage of history. Every day is the day of some man, who, by reason of birth or political importance or money or even because of some vicious crime or scandal, finds his name on the page of the paper and on the lips of men and women everywhere. These are those who “have their day and cease to be.” “**In the days of Herod the king . . .**” Christ was born in a manger only a few miles from the place where Herod sat at his banquet table and slept in the royal bedchamber.

It does not so much matter whose day this is now. Great men will be forgotten and prominent names be heard no more. The important thing is to do the will of the God who sent forth His Son; for in eternity He knoweth them that are His and He never forgets the name of the humblest of His own.

Alone I walked the ocean strand;
A pearly shell was in my hand:
I stooped and wrote upon the sand
My name—the year—the day.
As onward from the spot I passed,
One lingering look behind I cast;
A wave came rolling high and fast,
And washed my lines away.

And so, methought, 'twill shortly be
With every mark on earth from me:
A wave of dark oblivion's sea
Will sweep across the place
Where I have trod the sandy shore
Of time, and been, to be no more,
Of me—my day—the name I bore,
To leave no track nor trace.

And yet, with Him who counts the sands
And holds the waters in His hands,
I know a lasting record stands
Inscribed against my name,

Of all this mortal part has wrought,
Of all this thinking soul has thought,
And from these fleeting moments caught
For glory or for shame.

—Hannah Flagg Gould

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HOPE OF GLORY

“**In the beginning God . . .**” Thus the book of Genesis begins. “**A coffin in Egypt.**” Thus it ends. What a contrast! Here we are reminded of the destructive power of sin, for the God who was in the beginning had created a beautiful world, planted a lovely garden and made man and put him in the garden. But sin entered and death by sin. All Adam's children had in them from that day the seed of death. So, appropriately the book of beginnings closes with a mournful tribute to the power of sin over human flesh, for “**in Adam all die.**”

But the coffin in Egypt is a reminder of happier things as well. It speaks of faith. Joseph believed that God was going to do the things which He had promised—that He would give Israel the rich and lovely land east and north of Egypt. He believed it so firmly that he gave orders for his body to be embalmed after the Egyptian fashion and placed in a coffin that it might be in readiness to be taken by his people in the time when God should fulfill His promise.

Joseph had done his job well in Egypt. He had received honors and fame, but he had a hope of glory more lasting than that which had been his during his life time. That hope was of a time when God should make of His children a great nation. Though he had been honored in Egypt and ruled there under Pharaoh's appointment, he remembered his heritage in Canaan. The Egyptian coffin in its temporary resting place in the land of Goshen spoke of this hope.

For three hundred years it rested in Egypt, but there came a day when Israel began her long march toward the land which God had promised her and when that day came the mummified body of Joseph went along. The carved Egyptian coffin did not remain in Egypt but came at last to rest in the cave of Machpelah with the dust of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When Israel, of the Lord beloved,
Out from the land of bondage came,
Her fathers' God before her moved,
An awful guide, in smoke and flame.

By day, along the astonished lands
The cloudy pillar glided slow;
By night, Arabia's crimsoned sands
Returned the fiery column's glow.

Thus present still, though now unseen,
When brightly shines the prosperous day,
Be thoughts of Thee a cloudy screen,
To temper the deceitful ray.

And O, when gathers on our path,
In shade and storm, the frequent night,
Be Thou, long-suffering, slow to wrath,
A burning and a shining light.

— Walter Scott

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SUNSET

Have you ever noticed that often on a day which had been dark and stormy, on one of those gloomy days when the sun has not shown its face since early morning, the descending sun will pierce through the clouds? Suddenly everything becomes bright and golden and the clouds which have been dark and gray look like red velvet fringed with gold. All the western sky becomes a luminous picture. Glowing landscapes, vistas of fiery seas and purple mountains are painted in the heavens by the brush of flame in the hand of the dying sun. This is a perfect example from nature of these words from Zechariah 14:7: "**At evening time it shall be light.**"

There is many a Christian whose life has been like such a day. Over his head has passed one dark cloud of sorrow after another. Life's day has been made gloomy by trials and difficulties. There have been storms of danger and winds of suffering and blinding showers of grief. Loneliness and disappointment have been his companions through the day.

But, with the evening of life comes light and glory. The very clouds which darkened his day become the background upon which radiance can play in flaming beauty and glowing color. Old age for God's child may become the richest and most blessed time of life.

An old man once said to a preacher, "I am a happy man for I have lived for Christ. The devil has no happy old men."

The very elements which have made the day dark and stormy can become the background for the beauty of the sunset. But out of the sorrows and tribulations of life God brings beauty and radiance with the peace and fulfillment of old age. The temptations of youth and the strife of middle life are forgotten when God gives light at evening time.

Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labor and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.

— Arthur Hugh Clough

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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