

Compensations in the Lot of Every Christian

By John Dickie

THE minds of a few Christians being exercised about the subject of Divine Compensations on the afflictions through which the Lord's children are often called to pass, one of them wrote to the Author of the little book, "The Devil's Cradle," asking for an expression of his thoughts on the subject. His letter in reply was found to be so helpful that it is now printed in the hope that it may be a comfort to some, who may be passing through deep waters; and with the earnest prayer that God will graciously use it for the blessing of many readers.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour" (Isa 43:2-3).

I understand "Compensation" to mean a something on the one side that goes to counter balance a corresponding something on the other. Your friend, I dare say, uses the term with reference to the outward circumstances of a man's lot in life, and to the DOUBLE influence which each of these circumstances exerts on spiritual interests. The FAVORABLE circumstances (or what are counted such) are not altogether favorable, but have compensating drawbacks; while the unfavorable circumstances are not altogether unfavorable, but have compensating advantages. It is the part of wisdom then, to look at the entire set of circumstances amid which God has set us, as a perfectly adjusted whole, and to lie passive in His gracious hands, saying "amen" to His sovereign disposal of us.

In fact there are no circumstances in a Christian's lot that can rightly be spoken of as evil, for the lot, down to it's minutest details, is all arranged by God; and "as for God, HIS way is perfect" (Psa 18:30)—perfect in its wisdom as in its LOVE. He has devised a wonderful plan in regard to each of us; and He is working it out daily, and hourly with persevering steadfastness. But we too, alas, allow ourselves to form plans about our own lives; and, as His plan and ours, about ourselves, are never the same, the working out of His plan is certain to cross ours at a thousand points. These points, where our plan is marred by His, we call EVILS: and this subject of "compensation" may be useful to us, if our meditation on it helps us to feel more deeply, that anything may be made an evil to us, if in self-will we seek to enjoy it, or employ it, apart from God, and for our own ends.

The circumstances of a man's life may be roughly grouped into two classes; the pleasant, and the unpleasant. The pleasant things in our lot we easily see to be mercies; and we are thankful for them. This is so far right, but these same pleasant things are also trials, and full of danger to us; and we have need, in enjoying them, to cry "Lead us not into temptation," for their helpfulness has a perilous "compensation" annexed to it.

Good health, for instance, and kind friends, and worldly comforts, are very pleasant; and they are God's good gifts. But how often, I had almost said, how invariably, are they more or less, misused. How many sinners do they keep lying, like besotted drunkards, asleep in the devil's arms! Aye, and how many Christians are feeble and languid, living and little more than living, because of their enjoyment of these mercies. The prodigal, in Luke 15, would never have sought his father had he found rest in the "far country." Israel would never have sought God in penitence if He had not planted thick hedges with sharp thorns between her and her former enjoyments (Hos 2:6,7). No one ever seeks God, except under the sore pressure of constraining need. It is for this end that affliction is sent. On the other hand, the natural effect of outward ease is godless worldliness—see Psalm 73: and note the word "Therefore" in verse 6: "*Therefore* pride compassed about them as a chain; violence covers them as a garment."

On the other hand, outward trial is unpleasant; and it is not to be desired for its own sake. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb 12:11). Thus its issues are, with God's blessing *very precious*, and this is its "compensation." It worketh the peaceable fruits of

righteousness, and as the results of its precious efficacy stretch forward into eternity, it enriches the soul that is suitably exercised by it, infinitely beyond the calculation of angelic intellect. We are told, again, that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—(II Cor 4:17). (Note in this verse that the affliction is spoken of as actually *working out* the glory; so that the same degree of glory would not be reached apart from the affliction).

Without being made truly *humble*, no man shall ever be *exalted*. “For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14). Humility is to be regarded as an indispensable pre-requisite for the everlasting glory. No man, unless he be “poor in spirit” can expect to inherit the eternal kingdom (Matt 5:3). Now there are two influences that are needed to work in a man this indispensable humility. He must be placed in circumstances which are more or less humiliating. There is a positive “need-be” for this; and therefore the Lord never omits this mode of treatment in the training of His best-beloved children (James 2:5; Heb 12:6-10; Rev 3: 19). Affliction is merely another word for these humiliating circumstances. And besides these, the man needs, also, the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit on his heart, to render efficacious all these external instrumentalities. But the whole process is carried on in a love that is unutterable; and the issues aimed at are so glorious, that, even now, amid our severest trials, we should be able, not only to rejoice exceedingly, but to rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable, in the liveliest anticipation of the glorious outcome (IPeter 1:6-8,13).

The principle to which we are referring is just as applicable to a believer's *service* as it is to his spiritual development, and his training for the eternal glory. Perhaps you have read a little book of the last century, “*Frazer on Sanctification*.” The writer of it had one of the most unsuitable wives that ever afflicted a good man, but the sore trial was useful to refine and elevate his spirit; and without the wife he would never have been able to write the book.

Next to our actual salvation, we should set our goals on God's use of us. Like the prophet, as soon as we have been purged ourselves, we should cry, “Here am I; send me” (Isa 6:8). But if God use us, He will do it in a sphere of His own choosing, and not of ours; and He will do it in a way that carries out His own plans, and not ours. And these plans of His are sure to thwart and upset our own. But if we be observant, we shall see, long ere all be done, that there have been blessed compensations in our lot. Nay, when all is done, we shall see that these compensations, so called, have not even been “compensations,” for there was no evil in our lot to be compensated. That in short, God's way with us, from first to last, has been *altogether* “a right way.”

John Bunyan, for instance, lay in Bedford jail for more than a dozen years. His earnest voice was stilled; and he who, of all men in England of that day, was the one best fitted to exhibit clearly the rich grace of God to sinful men, was not allowed to speak at all. “What a pity!” said some; “What a mystery!” said others. It was neither a pity, nor yet a mystery; it was God's grand plan for Bunyan's more fruitful ministry. In his prison he wrote “*The Pilgrim's Progress*,” a book that has been ten times more useful to the church than all his preaching could have been, and which would not have been written, had he not thus been confined. What a “compensation”—as it is called!

And similarly we might glance at Paul's imprisonment at Rome. He had there to confine his ministry to a very narrow sphere indeed. The caged eagle could leap only from spar to spar of his narrow cage. But his epistles—he wrote the warmest and the profoundest of them there—have been a more blessed service, on the whole, than his living voice could have been.

And glance too at Paul's early training for his subsequent ministry. In his Pharisaic days, see his legal self-righteous zeal. It knew no limits. It set him even on blood-thirsty persecution. What a pity! Nay, no pity at all. The suffering martyrs were not injured a bit; for God gave them blessed “compensations” through their sufferings; while Paul himself was learning the utter worthlessness of Judaism, and was being fitted to become, when God's set time should come, the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Let me remind you too, of the devout Jonathan Edwards. He was most ungratefully treated by his people at Northampton. They drove him away. As men speak, his prospects were ruined. No; he was simply set at leisure to write those books which have multiplied his serviceableness a hundredfold.

We have glanced at this subject of divine compensation in its bearing on our spiritual education, and also in its bearing on a Christian's service to the Lord; but even in regard to the believer's present joy (a very

subordinate matter) these divine compensations are very wonderful. In July, 1856, I sat beside the dying bed of one who had been a sorely afflicted saint. He had had twelve children, and they had all been taken from him; his wife had also been taken, and he was very poor. He said to me one morning with a bright face, "I have got wonderful light last night on God's dealings with me. He has been kind, and yet so blind have I been that I never saw it till now. I felt that he had sorely afflicted me, in taking away all my beloved ones; and though I bowed under His holy hand, yet I felt it to be a sore trial. But I see His goodness in it now. Every one of my children is in glory, and I am going to join them. How anxious would I have been this day, if I had been leaving them in a world like this. But they are all safe with Jesus, and I want nothing more. My heart is full of thankfulness that the Lord took them all." Was this no "compensation?" Alas, that his faith in God had not been simple enough to have put him in possession of this peace and joy, many, many years before his triumphant end. How many a tear would it have spared him; how many a song of praise would it have enabled him to sing!

In fact we allow ourselves to reason far too much. I am speaking of our treatment of spiritual matters; while we trust in God, with entire singleness of heart far too little. The injury which is done to ourselves in this way no tongue could tell. Our entire blessedness, as men "in Christ," comes to us only as we exercise this simple faith; while such faith finds no enemies so powerful as these same fleshly reasonings. They exalt themselves against our due acknowledgment of God (II Cor 10:5); and we shall make little progress, until, with the promised help of God, we cast them down. As Christians, we are called to walk by faith, amid circumstances where all besides walk by sight (II Cor 5:7). Every act which is not done by us in faith, is as a consequence, done in sin (Rom 14:23). Of course, to walk by faith implies that we do not see our own way; but that, trusting in Him who sees it perfectly, we commit ourselves to His gracious guidance. In this way, faith has always to be exercised in the dark. But since God is what we believe Him to be—infinite in every adorable perfection, how safely may we trust Him; at the same time, and just because He is thus infinite in His perfections, our trust must necessarily be exercised in the dark—must be trust in *God Himself*, without any adequate compensation of His plans, on our part. How could we be able to grasp with intelligence the immense reaches of His stupendous purposes of love? Be it enough for us that we are warranted to exclaim with joy—whatever our outward lot may be: "I am poor and needy, but the Lord is planning for me" (Psa 40:17).

Indeed, in receiving Christ, as the Father gives Him to us, we disown forever all trust in our own wisdom. This thought is less familiar to us than another thought is—that in order to a man's being found in Christ, and having His righteousness, the man needs to cast away, and to disown his own. It is not until the man sees his own righteousness to be but filthy rags—to be loss and dung, that he can find true rest of heart in "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer 23:6). And the case is precisely the same in regard to Christ as our wisdom. He is made of God to us our exclusive wisdom, as He is made our exclusive righteousness (I Cor 1:30). Apart from Him we have no true wisdom, or righteousness; and to enjoy Him as actually our wisdom, and our righteousness, we need absolutely to reject our own. How grievously then do we sin, and how sadly do we suffer, when we allow ourselves to lean to our own understandings, instead of trusting in the Lord with all our hearts (Prov 3:5).

And I do think that there is no subject of spiritual interest, concerning which we are more ready to indulge these fleshly reasonings, or in which they are more full of mischief to ourselves, than when we attempt to judge the varied bearings of our own earthly lot. Unlike that of the Lord Jesus, our judgment is after the "sight of our eyes" (Isa 11:3). We forget that it is utterly impossible for the fleshly mind to estimate aright the things of the spirit (I Cor 2:11-14), as impossible as it is for the cattle in the fields, or the dogs in the streets. And though the Christian is not now, as once he was, led by his fleshly mind, that mind is still in him, to be a cause of constant conflict, and a source of perpetual danger. And this carnal mind is, in the believer, just what it is in the unbeliever: "Enmity against God," not subject to God, and incapable of subjection (Rom 8:7). The Christian therefore has to mortify it daily; and insofar as he fails to do this, his spirit is carnal and his mind shall be unsteady. If, by its very wisdom, the world is kept in ignorance of God (I Cor 1:21), the Christian too, by the same fleshly wisdom, so far as he follows it, is kept in partial ignorance, and in grievous weakness.

We see what a muddle Job and his friends got into, when they attempted to solve Job's case by their own reasonings about it. At the close God graciously interposed to correct their mistakes; but how did He do so? Was it by pointing out to them some flaw in their logic, by explaining to them the details of His methods and His plans? It was anything but this. He gave no countenance whatever to their presumptuous reasonings on such subjects but He simply recalled to Job the grand truth which they had all forgotten—that God's majesty is infinitely above man's conception of it, and that His ways of wisdom are altogether beyond man's power to trace. He brought them to the self-abased submission of simple unreasoning trust; and they reached rest, not in seeing, but in believing. Let us, with our whole hearts, come to Job's final finding as soon as possible; and, abhorring ourselves for our indulgence of this carnal self-reliant wisdom in the past, let us repent of it in dust and ashes. "I hate thoughts," cries the Psalmist, "But thy law do I love" (Psa 119:113).

We sometimes say to the perplexed sinner, in the words of the hymn— "All is finished, do not doubt it; But believe thy dying Lord; Never reason more about it, Only take Him at His word."

Might we not say the same thing to ourselves oftentimes when depressed and perplexed? Just as bodily pain is proof of disease somewhere, so spiritual perplexity is proof of defective faith. And just as the troubled sinner needs simple faith to put him into possession of Christ, so the troubled saint needs simple, heartier faith to bring him in to a fuller enjoyment of the searchable riches of Christ. We see from Old Testament prophecy, and from our Lord's own sayings, that God the Father had a minutely detailed life-plan for His beloved Son. He has a life for every child of His, which is equally minute. Oh, if His special providence includes in its care the chattering sparrow, can it overlook the blood-redeemed child? And if it take note of the hairs of his head, shall it neglect the weightiest of all his interests? Let us cast all our burdens on the Lord, and see to leave them with Him, seeking grace to say continually, as our Lord said, "I have come not to do Mine Own will, but the will of Him that sent me." Yours, J. D.

I bow to Thy will, O God! And all Thy ways adore; And every day I live, I'd seek To please Thee more and more.

Thy will the end—the blessed rule Of Jesus' toils and tears; Thy will the PASSION OF HIS HEART Those three and thirty years.

And He hath breathed into my soul A special love to Thee, A love to lose my will in Thine, And by that loss be free.

I have no cares, O blessed Lord! For all my cares are thine; I live in triumph, too, for Thou Has made Thy triumphs mine.

And when it seems no chance nor change From grief can set me free, Hope finds its strength in helplessness, And, patient, waits on Thee.

Man's weakness, waiting upon God, Its end can never miss; For men on earth no work can do More angel-like than this.

He always wins who sides with God, To him no chance is lost; God's will is sweetest to him when It triumphs at His cost.

Ill that God blesses is our good, And unblest good is ill; And all is right that seems most wrong If it be His sweet will.

This tract was formerly entitled "Divine Compensations."