

Sorrow In Christian Homes

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"Men die, but sorrow never dies; The corroding years divide in vain, And the wide world is knit with ties Of common brotherhood in pain."—Susan Coolidge

Sooner or later, sorrow comes to every home. No conditions of wealth or culture or social standing, or even of religion, can exclude it. When two young people come from the marriage-altar, and set up their new home, it seems to them that its joy never can be disturbed, that grief can never reach their hearts in that charmed spot. For a few years, perhaps, their fond dream remains unbroken. The flowers bloom into still softer beauty and richer fragrance; the music continues light and joyous, with no minor cords; the circle is unbroken; child-lives grow up in the tender atmosphere, blessing the home with their love and loveliness; the household life flows on softly and smoothly, like a river, gathering in breadth and depth as it flows. In other homes, all about, there are sorrows, bereavements, but amid these desolations of the dreams of other households, this one remains untouched, like an oasis in the desert; but not forever does the exemption continue. There comes a day when the strange messenger of sorrow stands at the door, nor waits for bidding and welcome, but enters, and lays his withering hand on some sweet flower. The first experience of grief is very sore: its suddenness and strangeness add to its terribleness. What seemed so impossible yesterday, has become a fearful reality to-day. The dear one whom we held so securely, as we thought that we never could lose her, is gone now, and answers no more to our call. It seems to us that we never can be comforted, that we never can enjoy life again, since the one who made for us so much of the gladness of life has been taken away. The time of the first sorrow is to every life a most critical point, a time of great danger. The way is new and untried, one over which the feet have never passed before. At no other point, therefore, is wise and loving guidance more needed. Many lives are wrecked on the hidden reefs and the low, dangerous rocks that skirt the shores of sorrow's sea. Many persons find in grief an enemy only, to whom they refuse to be reconciled, and with whom they contend in fierce strife, receiving only injury and harm to themselves in the unavailing conflict. An impression prevails, that sorrow is in itself a blessing in its influence, that it always makes purer and holier and better the lives that it touches; but this is not true. Sorrow has in itself no cleansing efficacy, as some suppose, by which it removes from sinful lives their blemishes and stains. The same fire which refines the gold destroys the flowers. Sorrow is a fire, which in God's hand is designed to purify the lives of his people, but which, unblessed, produces only desolation. It depends on the relation of the sufferer to Christ, as a friend or enemy, and on the reception given to grief, whether it leave good or ill where it enters; but in a Christian home, where the love of Christ dwells and holds sway, sorrow should always leave a benediction. It should be received as God's own messenger; and we should welcome it, and listen for the divine message it bears. For God's angels do not always come to us, as we are apt to imagine them coming, in radiant dress, with smiling face and gentle voice. Thus artists paint them in their pictures. Thus we fancy them in their ministries. We think of them as possessing rare and wondrous loveliness; and so, no doubt, they do as they appear before God, and serve in his presence. There is no unloveliness in any angel-face in heaven. No angel has features of sternness; but, as these celestial messengers come to earth on their ministries, they appear oftentimes in forms that appal, and fill the trembling heart with terror and alarm. Yet oftentimes it is when they come in these very forms that they bring their sweet messages and their best blessings.

"All God's angels come to us disguised,
Sorrow and sickness, poverty and death,
One after other lift their frowning masks,
And we behold the seraph's face beneath,
All radiant with the glory and the calm
Of having looked upon the face of God."

Wherever God's messenger of sorrow is thus received in a Christian home, with welcome even amid tears and pain, it will leave a blessing of peace, and will the home sweeter, tenderer, heavenlier. We speak of

love as the atmosphere in which the home reaches its best development in the direction of happiness, as in summer warmth the flowers unfold their rarest beauty and sweetest fragrance; but really no home ever attains its highest blessedness and joy, and its fullest richness of life, until in some way sorrow enters its door. Even the home love, like certain autumn fruits, does not ripen into its sweetest tenderness until the frost of trial have touched it. When a green log of wood is laid on the andirons, on a winter evening, and the fire begins to play about the log, a wierd, plaintive music comes from the wood. A poet would tell you, that, while the tree stood in the forest, the birds sat amid its branches, and sang there, and that the notes of their songs hid away in the tree. Then he would tell you that the music you now hear from the log as it burns, is this bird-minstrelsy, which has remained imprisoned in the wood until brought out by the hot flames. The poet's thought is only fancy, but it well illustrates a truth concerning the life of a Christian home, wvhich is worth pondering and remembering. In the sunny days of joy, the bird-notes of gladness are sung all about us, and sink away into our hearts, and hide there. The lessons, the influences, the tender impressions, the peace, and the beautiful things of quiet, happy, prosperous years, fall upon our lives, as the sunbeams and rain-showers fall the fields and the long autumn and winter and early spring, and seem to be lost. There appears but little to show for so much absorption of brightness and blessing. Our loves do not appear to yield the measure of joy they should yield. Then the flames of trial are kindled; and, in the heat of suffering, the long-gathering and long-slumbering music is set free, and flows out. Many of the world's best things have been born of affliction. The sweetest songs ever sung on earth have been called out by suffering. The richest blessings that we enjoy have come to us out of the fire. The good things we inherit from the past are the purchase of suffering and sacrifice. Our redemption from Getsemane and Calvary. We get heaven through Christ tears and blood. Whatever is richest and most valuable in life anywhere has been in the fire. Our love for one another may be strong and true in the sunny days, but it never reaches its holiest and fullest expression until pain has touched our hearts, and called out the hidden treasures of affliction. Even the love of a mother for her child, deep and pure as it is, never reaches its full wondrousness of devotion and sacrifice until the child suffers, and the mother bends over it in yearning and solicitude. The same is true of all the home loves: the best and divinest qualities in them come out only in the fires. The household that has endured sorrow in the true spirit of love and faith, emerges from it undestroyed, untarnished, with purer, tender affections, with less of passion, of selfishness, and earthliness. When husband and wife stand together beside their dead child, they are drawn to each other as never before: their common grief is sacramental. Children that remain are dearer to parents after one has been taken. Brothers and sisters grow more thoughtful and patient in their mutual intercourse when the home circle has been broken. There is an empty chair in a Christian home a wondrous power to soften the asperities of nature, and refine all the affections and feelings. The cloud of grief that hangs over a household, like the summer cloud above the fields and gardens, leaves blessings. Is it raining, little flower? Be glad of rain. Too much sun would wither thee. `Twill shine again. The sky is very black, `tis true, But just behind it shines blue. Art thou weary, tender heart? Be glad of pain; In sorrow sweetest things will grow As flowers in rain. God watches, and thou wilt have sun When clouds their perfect work have done. But how many we make sure off the benedictions that sorrow brings? Even the gospel is the savor of death to those who reject it; and sorrow, though it may be God's evangel, ofttimes comes and goes away again, leaving no heavenly gift. How must we treat this dark-robed messenger, if we would receive the heavenly blessings it bears in its hands? We must welcome it, even in our trembling and tears, as sent from God. We must believe that it comes from our Father, and that, coming from him, it is a messenger of love to us, bearing a true blessing to us, though it be a loss or a pain. We must ask for the message which God has sent us in the affliction, and listen to it as we would to a message of gladness. It has some mission to us, or some gift from heaven. Some golden fruit lies hidden in the rough husk. Some bit of gold in us God designs to be set free from its dross by this fire. There is some radiant height beyond this dark vally, to which he wants to lead us. Christ himself accepted and endured with loving submission the bitter sorrow of his cross, because he saw the joy set before him and waiting beyond the sorrow. In the same way, we should accept our griefs, because they are but the shaded gateways to peace and blessedness. If we cannot get through the gateways, we cannot get the radiant joys that wait beyond. Not to be able to take from our Father's hand the seed of pain, is to miss the fruits of blessing which can grow from no other sowing. If we are wise, we will give sorrow as cordial a welcome as joy; for it is

from the same loving hand, and brings gifts as good and golden. We must remember, that it is in the home where Christ himself dwells, that sorrow unlocks its heavenly treasures. A Christless home receives none of them. Those who shut their doors on Christ, shut out all blessedness, and, when the lamps of earthly joy go out, are left in utter darkness. A wise forethought will make sure of the hopes and comforts of a personal interest in Christ, and of having him as a guest in the sunny days, that, when the shadow of night falls, the stars of bright hope may shine out.