



GARDINER SPRING

THE MISSION
OF SORROW



SUMMARY

GOD'S WITNESS
DESERVED
SUBMISSION UNDER SORROW
DISTURBS IDOLATROUS ATTACHMENTS
THE FRIEND OF CHRISTIAN GRACES
TAKING LESSONS FROM THE BIBLE
FITNESS FOR HEAVEN THROUGH SORROW
NO SORROW THERE

GOD'S WITNESS

It must be a hard heart that is not touched with the sorrows of the bereaved. Our sympathy may give courage to the mourner, and relieve his solitude, even where it cannot alleviate his woes. Calamity in every form makes an appeal to every Christian mind for correspondent feeling, for fellowship, for counsel.

The sorrows which for months past have inundated this land, and which now sweep over it like the waves of the sea, have been vividly present to the writer of these pages; and he would gladly give utterance to a few thoughts in which his own heart beats in unison with the afflicted. We weep with those who weep. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." We "remember those who are in adversity, as being ourselves also in the body." We have all much to be thankful for, and much to mourn over. Sorrow has its approved mission. If the Father of mercies "does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," there must be some reason for these afflictions- a "needs be" that is absolute and imperative. We should "hear the rod, and him who has appointed it."

Atheism is the great vice of the human mind. It is the nature of sin to be blindfold, especially to the existence and attributes and presence of the great Unseen. It is the element of sin to live at a distance from God. It is the refuge and triumph of sin, when "the fool has said in his heart, There is no God."

*"The owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings across the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and shuts them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in heaven,*

Cries out, Where is it?"

There is no more emphatic or terse description of wicked men than that they are "without God in the world." This is their character, and leads to all their negligence, all their unbelief, and all the varied forms of their ungodliness. When once a man loses sight of the God of heaven, and has no abiding impressions of him "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing," who can measure or limit his roving, or tell where he will stop? Yet to this practical atheism men are everywhere exposed. The tendency to it is strong and seductive, and impelled by all the subtlety of him "who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Men live and go forth into the world, and look on its beauty and its bloom, every planet and star reflecting the image of the Deity, every stream and summer cloud and breathing fragrance all with one voice vocal with his praise; yet they are ignorant of God, estranged from God, alienated from God. What they are taught concerning him, they do not understand; what they understand, they misinterpret; what they do not misinterpret, they forget, and choose to forget, because they "do not like to retain God in their knowledge." The language of their hearts is, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways." They have no notion of being controlled by "a Power above them," but rather shake off all impressions of religious obligation, that they may sin without restraint and without remorse.

It is a great thought to enter the mind that THERE IS A GOD. The knowledge of God lies at the foundation of all knowledge, of all truth, all morality, all religion, all real and permanent happiness. "This is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Just as the whole frame of the universe would totter to its foundation if there were no God, so all sense of moral obligation and all true religion have nothing to rest upon where God is not known. Men must be made to think of God, to see him in some measure as he is, guiding, directing, and governing all things after the counsel of his own will. They may not stop their ears when he speaks, nor flee from his presence when he comes near; rather must they acquaint themselves with him as a God at hand, and not a God afar off, and as a very present help in the time of trouble. And this is THE MISSION OF SORROW. It is God's witness. It speaks for God to this thoughtless and suffering world.

Among the methods pursued in order to set this great and good Being before the minds of men, the Scriptures often advert to the afflictive dispensations of his providence. "The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes." This is one of the laws of his kingdom. Severe judgments indicate his being, his presence, his displeasure.

They testify to his agency in all the affairs of men, and trace them to the great First Cause. A truly devout mind, one would judge, finds some repose here. It is cold comfort to be told that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and that it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Yet so it is. It is not more a law of nature that bodies lighter than the atmosphere ascend, and those that are heavier descend towards the earth, than it is the law of his being that he must be a sufferer. Every man knows this; but he would know more. And he may know more.

The laws of nature are not fortuitous arrangements, but form the principles on which the God of nature conducts his wise and benevolent procedures throughout the physical creation.

It is our joy to know that there is no such thing as chance in the kingdom of nature. Everything is the result of design, and indicates the all-wise Designer. And is it less so in the moral world, and in the kingdom of grace? It would be a revolting thought that the sorrows, either of good or bad men, are uncaused, undirected, and that no all-seeing eye watches over them, and no unwearied arm restrains and controls them; and that while there is a wise and sovereign Arbiter, who balances the clouds and prepares rain for the earth, and makes the grass to grow upon the mountains, who silences the storm, and says to the invader, "hitherto shall you come, and no further," there is no such wise and benevolent supremacy over the thousand ills that flesh is heir to. Human life would be scarcely worth enjoying if blind fate were the controller.

The more thoughtful and virtuous would reason as some of the wiser heathen reasoned, when, in their attempts to strike the balance between the good and the ill of man's existence, they were driven to the conclusion that it is a doubtful question whether existence is a blessing or a curse.

It is well that the Scriptures put this whole subject at rest, and explicitly instruct us, that whatever the form or degree of suffering in our world, it is the visitation of God. Sickness and poverty, drought and pestilence, disarrangement and perplexity, bereavement and death- no matter what the trial, "affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground." "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it?" Be the means what they may, and the subordinate agents what they may- be they the sword of the enemy, or the sirocco of the desert; be they flood or fire; be they man's malignity or his envenomed tongue, the hand of God is in all.