

CHAPTER 22: Bereavement

My DEAR COMRADES,

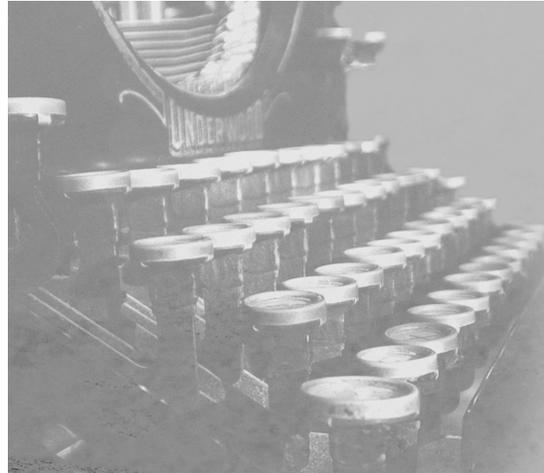
By Bereavements I mean the loss of dear ones, whether kindred or precious friends, through death. Many of my readers will have been called, already, to pass through this experience, and they will know it to be one of the most painful that can possibly come to man. Others have yet to feel that mysterious sense of helplessness, that inner agony and grief, which seize us as we watch our loved ones die. Money, reputation, health, and a great many other valuable things, when lost may often be recovered, but, the companions, of our hearts, and homes and lives, when summoned by the inevitable silent Visitor, can never be restored to us in this world. They cannot be brought out of the grave, or given back to our fond embrace, until the Resurrection morning. They "are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again."

Death is a painful visitor. The poet sings:
"Why do we mourn departing friends,
Or shake at death's alarms?
'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to His arms."

That is a beautiful sentiment, and as true as it is beautiful; nevertheless, after all has been said that can be said, to stand on the banks of the River, and watch your best-beloved struggle through its dark and stormy waters, even though you may catch some ray of brightness from the other shore, is a painful and agonising experience.

Still, God can, and does, wonderfully strengthen the hearts of His faithful children for those gloomy hours.

Many years ago, I spent six weeks in the house of a friend, who appeared to me to be one of the holiest men I had yet been privileged to meet. He has long since passed away to his reward. I hope to see him again in the Glory-land. This friend told me that his young wife died after they had lived together only a short time; that he loved her



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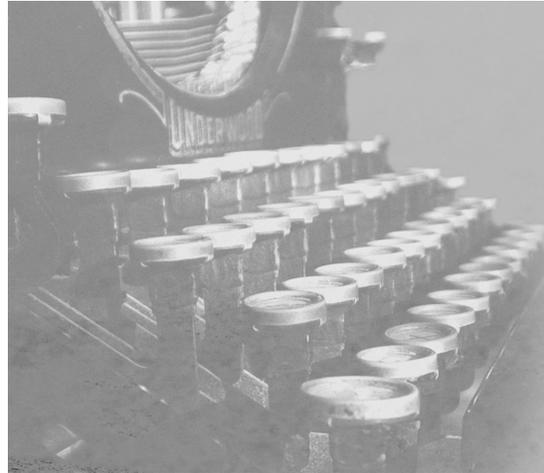
with all his heart, but he was so assured of the glorious, state of existence to which God, in, His love, had taken her, and was so comforted by the consolations of His Holy Spirit, that he was filled, as never before, with unspeakable triumph as he stood by her open grave. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy Victory?"

Wesley sings of death very much in. the same spirit. Here are three of the verses:

"Rejoice for a brother deceased,
Our loss is his infinite gain;
A soul out of prison released,
And freed from its bodily chain;
With songs let us follow his flight,
And mount with his spirit above,
Escaped to the mansions of light,
And lodged in the Eden of love.

"Our brother the haven hath gained,
Out-flying the tempest and wind,
His rest he hath sooner obtained,
And left his companions behind,
Still tossed on a sea of distress,
Hard toiling to make the blest shore,
Where all is assurance and peace,
And sorrow and sin are no more.

"Ah, lovely appearance of death!
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants that breathe,
Can with a dead body compare.
With solemn delight I survey



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The corpse when the spirit is fled,
In love with the beautiful clay,
And longing to lie in its stead."

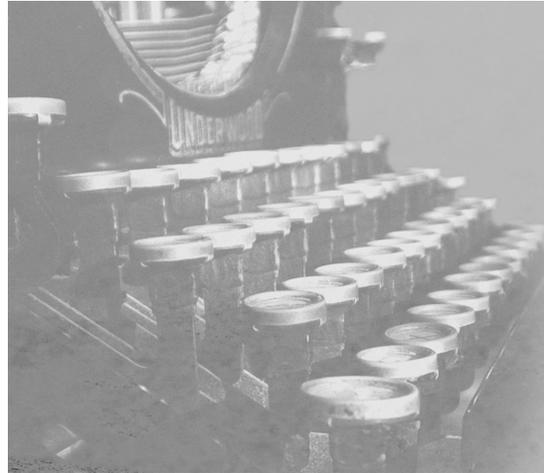
These lines set forth an experience which, I am afraid, is not very common. Many of my readers will acknowledge it as being some distance beyond them. Although full of confidence as to the safety of their loved ones, their hearts were none the less sorrowful when they bade them a last farewell; and daily and hourly they mourn their absence. What can I say to these sufferers?

1. Accept your sorrow without murmuring. There is an important difference between being weighed down under the burden of a great affliction and fighting against it. To rebel against a Divine decree will not help you. One of my Officers tells of a man, who said to him, one day, in a railway train, that he believed in God till he lost his child; but when the baby died, he gave up that belief. Whereupon the Officer asked him, what has often seemed to me a wise and tender question, Had giving up his faith in God made him feel any better about his loss? With tears in his eyes, he admitted that such was not the case. To readers of this Letter, whose hearts may be breaking on account of some painful Bereavement, let me say that, while God will not condemn you for your sorrow, to rebel against His Providence, instead of making you feel better, will only make you feel worse.

2. Thank God for having favoured you with such precious companions. Better to have loved and been loved again, even though only for a little while, than never to have known such love at all.

"I hold it true, whate'er befall,
I feel it when I sorrow most;
T'is better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

3. Rejoice, amid your sorrow, that your dear ones are safely landed on the Eternal Shore. If you had a son journeying on the wide seas to some distant land, and you



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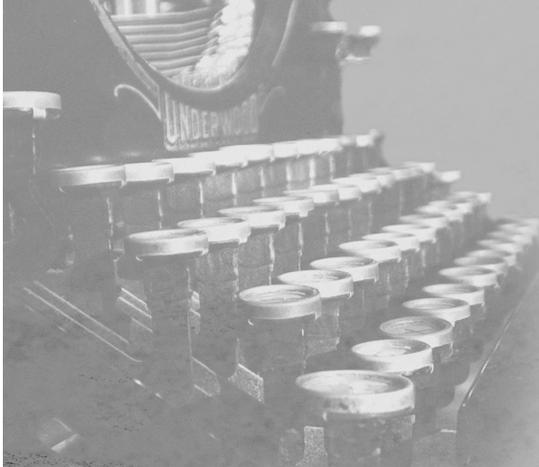
received tidings that the vessel had struck upon some sunken rock on some desolate coast, or had been destroyed by fire in mid-ocean, your first enquiry would be, "What about the passengers? What about my son?" If, for a time, you could get no information, the suspense would add to your distress; and, on the supposition that he had been drowned, you would probably feel, even if you did not say, that it would be a comfort to you if his poor body could be found and have a decent burial.

But supposing, that in the midst of your distress, the news reached you that, although the vessel was lost, the young man was saved, and that he had landed in a beautiful country among a friendly people, that his health was good, his surroundings agreeable, and that he had started an excellent business, with every promise of lasting prosperity. How great would be your joy!

Now, I feel that all comparisons between the earthly and the Heavenly are poor, indeed; but may not those who mourn the loss of departed friends, comfort themselves something after this fashion? Their loved ones have suffered a shipwreck, but they have not perished. No, they have been rescued and carried away to the Celestial shores. Their wants are abundantly supplied: their companions are the multitudes of the redeemed; their employments and felicities are beyond the power of our words to tell, or our minds to imagine: they are doing the will of our God, and will live in His presence for ever. They have entered into the infinite bliss of those of whom it is, written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have, entered into the heart, of man, the things which God, hath prepared for them that love Him."

4. Encourage yourself with the prospect of meeting again, those who have passed away from you, and that before very long. This was David's consolation on the loss of his child. He seems to have loved it very tenderly indeed, and there were few things in his kingdom so precious, that he would not have given to have kept the babe. But when it was gone, after the first agony of his grief, he bowed to the Divine will, saying: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

If the father I have just referred to, on hearing that his boy was safe and sound, happy and prosperous, although unable to return to his native land, had been informed that arrangements had been made for the emigration of himself and all his comrades,



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kindred, and friends to the same country, to participate in all the luxuries of which the young man was already the possessor, I am sure the father would have been still further comforted in his loss. I think he would have been likely to say, "Praise God; it is well with my boy; although he cannot come to us, we can go to him." We may have to wait awhile, but it will not be very long before we see him again and share in the delights of this new land."

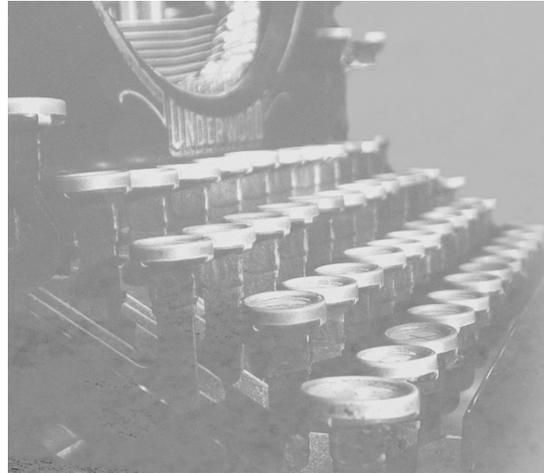
So, my Comrades, your wife or your husband, or some companion of your heart, a part of yourself as it were, or your darling, the flower of your flock, has suffered shipwreck on the ocean of time. The vessel in which that dear one sailed, went to pieces; perhaps it was worn out by old age, or it struck, perchance, upon some fever rock; or mayhap it was overtaken by some stormy epidemic, and after battling bravely for a time, went down to rise no more till the resurrection of the dead. But your loved one is safe. Your Master has sent forth the assurance, that you may meet again among the nations of them that are saved, and it is your business to get your work done thoroughly and well, and be ready for the meeting when your call shall come.

In my early days, I remember being very much impressed with the following simple song. It may, perhaps, carry a little comfort to some of my bereaved readers; and although not altogether unknown, I give it here for the sake of those who may not have met with it before. It is entitled:

"THE FIRST SONG OF THE SAINT IN HEAVEN."

"I shine in the light of God;
His likeness stamps my brow;
Through the valley of death my feet I have trod,
And I reign in Glory now.

"I have reached the joys of Heaven,
I am one of the sainted band;
For my head a crown of gold is given,
And a harp is in my hand.



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"I have learnt the song they sing
Whom Jesus hath set free,
And the glorious walls of Heaven still ring
With my new-born melody.

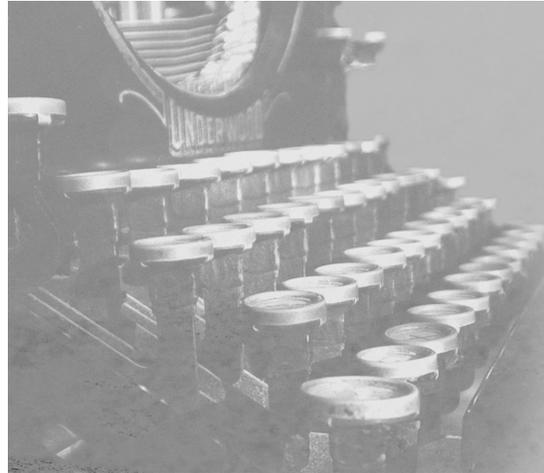
"Oh, friends of mortal years,
The trusted and the true!
Ye are watching still in the vale of tears,
But I wait to welcome you.

"Do I forget? Oh, no!
For memory's golden chain
Shall bind my heart to the hearts below,
Till they meet to touch again.

"Each link is strong and bright,
And love's electric flame
Flows freely down like a river of light
To the world from whence I came.

"Do you mourn when another star
Shines out from the glittering sky?
Do you weep when the raging voice of war
And the storms of conflict die?

"Then why should your tears run down,
And your hearts be sorely riven,
For another gem in the Saviour's crown,
And another soul in Heaven?"



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But here, some of my readers may be saying to me: "What if you cannot cherish this precious hope with respect to your departed kindred?" We have been to the grave, with those whose belief and character have prevented us entertaining any such pleasant expectations, as those you have mentioned. To us their future is a dark uncertainty.

"How can we comfort ourselves?" To them I can only make one reply: Leave them with God. The Judge of all the earth will do right. Hope for the departed cannot do them harm. So exercise it, if you can. But let the uncertainty which you feel about the destiny of the dead, make you doubly diligent in doing all that in you lies to secure a sure and certain hope for the living.