

The Faith That Makes Faithful

"He that fainteth in the day of adversity hath small strength."

WHAT ONE OF US has stood steadfast from the very start? Only the promise, "Lo! I am with you even to the end!" has sufficed to carry even the bravest through the inevitable weakness and discouragement of the battle. For battle the Christian life surely is—interior warfare with the enemy that none knows but the soul, and warfare with the world so alluring to the young. Our Father and our Lord well knows how difficult it is for us who set out on "The Path" to keep on, especially in the first years. We have seen a Star, a Vision, and we are perhaps impulsively eager to follow it. We may have the heart side (the feminine) overdeveloped; in which case we are emotional and easily moved by feelings; we lack balance. How easily, how soon we weaken, grow cool, lose enthusiasm! Still, having once started we are loth to slacken the pace. We are ashamed of our ofttimes luke-warmness. Nothing is so easily disturbed, so soon shaken—even lost—as a newly budded spirituality. The world is so little sympathetic, so utterly discouraging to our young ardor. Even the church seems lacking in the sense of fellowship we need. Our delicate wings are so easily withdrawn from the rough contact of a practical, commercial, and almost wholly material spirit. It really seems to us we have no place, and in loneliness and despair we cry out, "Oh, had I the wings



Die Bibel in Bildern, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

Jacob Wrestling with the Angel

As Paul said, we fight not against flesh and blood but against unseen adversaries—both our own lower nature and spirit beings who seek to encourage its expression in order to serve their own occult agendas. Before we can enter the "Promised Land" of the spirit worlds, we meet adversaries and tempters who will test our resolve and prove our virtue.

of a dove I would fly away and be at rest!" But it is not rest we need. We have rested too long, that is why our spiritual pinions have so little strength, they cannot beat against the winds of adversity, and so we almost stop. We do turn back maybe, just to feel again companionship. But we are spoiled for the world—or the world for us—there is no rest for the sole of our foot. Having set our face to the light, we moan in the darkness and after many days perhaps we once more essay the uphill path.

It is a long, a lonely way, marked by the occasional flower of friendship, by a rarely illuminated hour when the soul for a space seems lifted away from sordid things to the sweet and glorified heights. But for the most part it is a plodding on with the courage that comes of high resolve, of lofty ideals, of pure faith in the promise "to him,

who overcometh," and perhaps more than all, when emotion seems dead, enthusiasm worn threadbare, still lives love—love of righteousness that fills one's heart with praise, one's soul with a quiet peace that passeth all understanding, and we say with the Psalmist

*As the hart panteth for the water brooks,
So panteth my soul for Thee, Oh Lord!*

The intellect is by this time involved in the quest. The heart is supported by logic, by reason which knows what the love can only feel. And when religion is thus a marriage of faith and understanding, of trust and sound judgment, one is able to walk alone, if need be. The nature has become harmonious in itself, it is one with God, at-one-ment mated, complete. But this happy consummation is not for the first years. Very inefficient, poor little ones we are for many years.

A rare spirit fairly soars for a time in the first joy of finding Christ, after perhaps deep degradation, utter emptiness of soul. But this euphoria is quick to weaken; such exotic growth has little substance, it fades, falls at the first storm, and not because the love weakens, but such souls live by excitement, emotion; they do not bear a dull routine, a simple diet. They flourish in a blare of trumpets, a great light, the glory of the new vision, and cannot endure the quiet of ordinary days. They soar to the empyrean or descend to the depths. But as the birds—"spirits that would soar must fear neither depth nor height"—they must bear whatever comes, must prove their pinions by practice. We may feel quite disenchanted for a dull hour. Where is the vision? Was it only a dream? Is there no reality? And for plodding long years of such tame days we have no taste. This is the hour of the "Brothers of the Shadow." They laugh a disconcerting laugh of sneering belittlement of our visionary quest. But even for them we have a responsibility. Not one soul but is lifted a little by our fidelity, and no one is tried beyond his strength. The soul does not grow by leaps and bounds, it is by honest achievement, stage by stage, from birth to maturity. Only by patience, courage, loyalty, persistence—the same qualities that win in material life—do we gain.

When happy in our tub, Diogenes-like—when like the happy man whose shirt was sought by the

king who learned he had no shirt—when thus without friends or means or comfort or encouragement, like "Him who had not where to lay his head," like Him whom we follow, we can be poised and at peace—then we shall have arrived at one stage of our journey. Calvary must be reached and passed, the crucifixion of all outward things we love and hold dear, the heart of flesh, the affections, all will wither and leave us pinned to that hard and cruel cross of the body. Still we can summon an authentic smile and bless God for life, for the chance to become something worth while.

Have you read these lines?

*As once toward Heaven my face was set,
I came to a place where two roads met.
One led to Paradise and one away;
And fearful of myself lest I should stray,
I paused that I might know
Which was the road I ought to go.*

*The first was one my weary eyes to please,
Winding along through pleasant paths of ease,
Beneath shadows of fair branching trees.
This path of calm and solitude
Surely must lead to Heaven,
I cried in joyous mood.*

*Yon rugged one, so rough for weary feet—
The footpath of the world's too busy feet—
Can never be the way of life.
But at that moment I thereon espied
Footprints that bore traces of having bled;
And knew them for the Christ's;
So bowed my head
And followed where He led."*

And that is just the fact of the matter, We must plod on among the workers, ourselves workers too, and still keep the sense of uplift when everything, everyone about us, would drag us down. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." And not by what we say or do perhaps, but just by what we are—the light that is in us will radiate to other lives and brighten them, will attract them to what is in us—for in ourselves we are nothing—by just so much as we embody in daily living the principles of true Christian character do we win in this sordid battle with all material unloveliness. It is easy to be

lovely when life goes sweetly. It takes the Christ in us to shine when the world presses sinister, cold, cruel, on every hand. "Let us then be up and doing, with a heart for any fate."

I've just come across these lines; have they no message for the discouraged?

"Tho he were the Son, yet learned he by the things he suffered."

And these words of Paul's to the disciples:

"When for a time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat."

And remember about the man who having put his hand to the plow turned back. It is a serious thing for the soul to faint and fall by the way—and to go back, still more serious. It is possible for one to lose the capacity for Good, for spiritual life. To play fast and loose with the chance one has for growth and development, to become lax and indifferent after making one's vows, is to grow callous and finally drift away. "The last stage of that man is worse than the first." Just that sort of doing is what makes shipwreck of marriage, or of any adventure, for even religion is an adventure of our own choosing, the grandest, most wonderful of all undertakings. Compare the successful man in any enterprise with the failure. Is it not always he who endures the hardships, the stress, the weariness with courage, living one day at a time, bravely, always believing in himself and his cause, who wins through? And to one argonaut who comes out loaded down with precious gold, there are dozens who have fallen, have turned back, have drifted—human flotsam—to the beach, mere derelicts. The battle is to the strong, the pure, the earnest. Sheer enthusiasm may buoy one up for a time, but to endure requires a daily living with Christ, moment by moment—very humbly, lest we boast; very near, lest we lose the light, "All for Him, and the world well lost." Nothing is so hard to bear as disloyalty of our friends, family, "mine own particular friend in whom I trusted." Those of our own household can often contribute to our sense of aloneness.

Yes, all this He knew. I wonder if the young aspirants study the Bible enough? It has a word for every mood, for every need. It is complete, the full spiritual



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*When thou thinkest I am far from thee
I am often nearest thee*

journey with all its vicissitudes are there set forth in the lives of many of the faithful who learned by what they suffered. There is nothing new in our experiences. Pilgrim souls have always trod the same road, but each must advance on his own feet, as if for the first time. No one can do more than cheer us along. No one can learn for us. Step by step, day by day, we journey toward the goal—to Godliness. And we who have glimpsed the glory, started on "The Path," may give thanks for the bare capacity to love righteousness. Think, only think of the hosts of the utterly indifferent, unable even to desire the things of the Spirit—empty bodies, bare chambers, unfurnished! Who knows how long they will wander in dense darkness and not even know their poverty?

Friends, you are rich, happy, blessed, if already you are on the way out of carnality, eyes turned to the heights. The only hope is to keep looking up. And as soon as you take your eyes from the Star, you are apt to become dizzy, fall into the chasm at your feet, over which His arm can carry you, in Whom your faith is fixed.

All lofty souls, all strong ones, are alone—if not seemingly, yet in spirit. It is in loneliness that the soul grows strong. □

—Adele Oakdale