

Are you suffering from grief? Is someone you love suffering?

This sermon was preached just ten days after the death of the young pastor's wife. Still raw with emotion, the pastor hoped to comfort his congregation as "a bush that burns, and is not consumed because God is there." In administering comfort, he also hoped to receive the *lenitive*—the pain relief—he desired.

At the request of the ladies of the church, who were friends of the woman he loved, the pastor published this sermon. In republishing it, the same comfort is available in Christ for all who will believe.

*Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls;
All your waves and billows have gone over me.
The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime,
And in the night His song shall be with me—
A prayer to the God of my life.*

—Psalm 42:7-8

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THE LENITIVE OF SORROW



William T. Brantly

Introduction by Robert A. Snyder

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the explanation of history,
and the application of faith in Christ to all of life.*

The picture on the front cover is taken from a set of samples provided with Microsoft Works.

To the memory of Bill Lang,
whose legacy is cherished and imitated
among his children,

and to Jesus Christ,
who is able to sympathize with us in all our grief.

*For we do not have
a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,
but was in all points tempted as we are,
yet without sin.
Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace,
that we may obtain mercy
and find grace to help in time of need.*

—Hebrews 4:15-16

William T. Brantly
The Lenitive of Sorrow

Introduction

In the Scriptures, the apostle Paul blessed the God who routinely “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). The ability to comfort comes from divine comfort. Those who have been comforted by God in the pressures of life have the ability to comfort others in *any* trouble—not just those in the same circumstances, but even those in other circumstances, which is a fact that exceeds the support groups of our age.

William T. Brantly had such an ability. When he died, it was said of him, “No one was better able to soothe, as far as gentleness of manner and kindness of heart could do it, the pangs of the frame racked by disease, and to smooth its passage to the tomb. He had unshaken confidence in the exceeding great and precious promises of God, and was eminently successful in illustrating their efficacy to sustain the heart in the terrors of death.”¹ This ability is not surprising, given the comfort he himself received at age thirty-one, when he grieved the loss of his wife Anna. The sermon you hold in your hand testifies to this comfort. Remarkably, it was preached just ten days after her death, though perhaps expanded shortly thereafter for publication. In order for you to appreciate this sermon and its message, some background information may first be necessary.

In Augusta, Georgia, sometime in 1809, W. T. Brantly married Anna McDonald Martin, a widow and sister of Charles J. McDonald, one-time governor of Georgia. Although older than Brantly and not necessarily a “charmer,” the husband “was often

¹ This testimony by a northern editor is taken from Richard Fuller, *Intrepid Faith. A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. William Tomlinson Brantly, D. D.; with a Sketch of His Life and Character; Delivered at the Request of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C.* (Charleston: First Baptist Church, 1845), 29.

heard to remark afterward that she so powerfully allured him by the charms of her intellect that she was quite irresistible.”² According to one man, who knew her personally, she was a lady of such “talents, piety and accomplishments, as are rarely combined in one person.”³ Brantly certainly prized her. Even though he had received excellent training from Jonathan Maxcy at South Carolina College, Brantly often used to “acknowledge his indebtedness to her for the formation of his intellectual habits, in the most valuable particulars, *more than to all other persons put together.*”⁴ For nine years, the Brantlys enjoyed life together, first in Augusta, where William served as rector of Richmond Academy, then in Beaufort, South Carolina, where he served as pastor of a growing and prosperous church. Then came the abrupt end. On October 15, 1818, Anna died, having just given birth to their fourth child.

His wife’s death left a profound mark on Brantly, perhaps even larger than her life had left. To many in the outside world, her death may have been just another sad but common outcome in the risk of child-bearing; but to the bereaved husband, the loss was nothing less than the intervention of God. Writing to an editor of the *American Baptist Magazine* in Boston, Brantly spoke of his pain as a bleeding wound from a piercing sword:

She had gladdened nine years of my pilgrimage, and had been the tender counsellor and sweet ornament of my early days. Her sudden removal from me in a few days after the birth of her fourth child, has left me to bleed in the pain of protracted sorrow. . . . When I saw death seizing my fairest earthly hope, and depriving me of one by whose aid my ministry had been formed and directed, and whose deep experimental knowledge in the things of God afforded me

² B. D. Ragsdale, *A Glance Backward: The Brantlys in the Life of Georgia Baptists* (Macon, GA: n. p., 1933), 3.

³ “Intrepid Faith,” *Christian Review* 10 (December 1845): 597.

⁴ M., “Dr. Brantly” *The Christian Index*, 9 May 1845, n.p., italics original. The initial “M” stands for Basil Manly, Sr., who was studying for the ministry under Brantly at the time of Mrs. Brantly’s death.

extensive helps in my public efforts, it was like a sword piercing through my soul. But she was ripe for bliss.⁵

In the inner world of his soul, Brantly meditated on the meaning of this divine sword, and drew some intimate conclusions. The following excerpt is from a private entry that Brantly’s son may have preserved and then published after his father’s death. Its depth of perception and sorrow bears quotation in full:

I have long contemplated the ravages of death, in the desolation of those families to whose acquaintance divine Providence has directed me in the course of my ministry. I have seen the weeping parent, trembling in anguish over the grave of the departed child, and children, have I seen, bewailing the loss of their parents. In scenes of diversified grief, it has been my lot to witness a large portion of those afflictions incident to my guilty species. But none of these things had come near to me; only with my eyes had I seen them, and in the sympathies of my heart had I felt them. I had seen the tide of human woe rushing by me, and bearing others on its ruffled surface, whilst no torrents moved me along in the swelling course. Often called to minister comfort to others under their distress, it had been my endeavor to identify my own case with theirs, and to raise into sanctified sorrow that which might have seemed nothing more than natural affection. At length the volume of grief is unrolled in my own house. I am called to read and moisten every page with my tears. ‘I was at ease, and God hath broken me asunder.’ On my eyelids he has caused to rest the shadow of death. He has applied the hand of death to the loveliest object that ever attracted my eyes, or warmed my heart. In a moment he has taken from me the charms of intellect and the counsels of prudence. He has stopped, by the coldness of a mortal chill, the sweet

⁵ “Mourning with Resignation,” *American Baptist Magazine* 3 (March 1819): 49, 50. The letter is anonymous, but its timing, its proximity to an essay by Brantly, and the events described point to Brantly’s authorship.

current of maternal affection, and O, my God has taken from me my immortal Anna. The tenderest earthly name I ever read is blotted with the blackness of dissolution, and my bleeding bosom is torn from lover and friend.

Though it has pleased a merciful God thus to crush me with pressure of tribulation, yet I would not repine at his dispensation, nor vainly fret because he has trodden me down under his awful sovereignty. The time had arrived when it was necessary that my divided heart should be formed to greater singleness for God, and the dross of my affection purged from a worldly mixture which had grown alarming. A diseased soul required the salutary hand of the great Physician; and it was reasonable to expect that he would form the necessary prescription. Had its selection been given up to me, my foolish and fond heart would have inclined me to say, ‘Lord, spare me in that part where, of all others, I am most vulnerable. Let me not be cut to the heart by viewing the dying conflict of my ever endeared wife. Spare to me the guide and companion of my youth, the cheer of my solitudes, the solace of my perplexities and doubts, and the centre of my domestic joy. Cut me not off from the sweet counsel I have taken in going with her to the house of God.’

But I should have chosen thus to prolong her abode in the distractions of a world uncongenial with her heavenly tendencies. Through the whole period of nine years in which we were united, I had seen her leaning towards heaven, bending forward towards her incorruptible reversion, often soaring, on the pinions of a glowing faith, above this region of clouds, and resting in the realizing support of a spiritual home. Why, then, do I wonder that she has at last attained the wished for summit, that her spirit has reached its native skies, and will no more return to soothe my bleeding heart? Why should I think it strange that the dove should seek its window, and the wanderer, a home?

By this stroke of his hand, the Lord has set the world

before me in the naked vanity of all its offers and enjoyments. He has refuted me, by one tremendous argument, all my extravagant calculation, and revealed the only object of a sinner’s consolation and hope. Much of my anguish may be only the result of natural feeling and worldly attachment; yet I am constrained to bless God that he has made my heart soft, though I am greatly troubled by the overwhelming calamity which has been the means of subduing my unrelenting nature. Hence, though my grief is a gloomy burden, I would not have it removed. I am made a mourner all my days, and shall carry the impress of woe deeply formed on the tablet of my heart. I can believe, without the shadow of a doubt, that the spirit of that loved one who has gone, now with the rapt seraph adores and burns around the throne of God. The certainty of her high felicity must reconcile my lacerated feelings to the idea of a short separation.⁶

The grief, even the feelings of guilt—emotions that are so common to hurting man—all this was felt in those days after Anna’s death. To the Boston editor, Brantly asked prayer for “the genuine fruits of sanctified correction,” but he feared that he had not yet “had true repentance for my sin and vile ingratitude.”⁷ Brantly’s pain was real, and in the sermon that follows, this pain must be kept securely in mind. This sermon is no abstract speculation from the armchair of metaphysics, but in truth, to borrow C. S. Lewis’s phrase, a *grief observed*. Solid truth from the Solid Book consoled his heart. Standing on the rocks of divine providence and eternity, Brantly could then comfort others by his word and by his example, and in so doing, add a pain relief—a *lenitive*—to his own sorrow.

Fittingly, the sermon takes its text from Job, the classic example of suffering in the Old Testament. In Job 2:10, the patriarch reproves his wife for accepting from God only good and

⁶ J. H. Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke & Co., 1874), 214-16.

⁷ “Mourning with Resignation,” 50.

not adversity. Based on this comment, the sermon asserts as its main point: “The good which we accept at the hand of the Lord, should reconcile us to the evil which he may send upon us; and our cheerful acceptance of what we deem good, should lay us under an obligation to accept what we esteem evil.” In proving this thesis, Brantly offered his congregation two strong arguments why Christians should accept from the Lord both good and adversity. First, affliction is necessary, even for those who reside under God’s mercy. Second, affliction is but one component of an overall system of divine providence; therefore, affliction should not be viewed in isolation from all that God bestows. The sermon ends with some points of application, and a short eulogy, which “an overflowing heart” kept Brantly from enlarging.⁸

After nearly two centuries, this sermon is back in print, ready once again to offer comfort. Although the incidentals of life have changed, human grief has not. May the Lord, therefore, use it to administer comfort to believing hearts! If the style and wording seem challenging at first, please continue, and perhaps even read it again. It should repay the effort. Only minor things have been altered, such as punctuation, spelling, and bold print. No word has been changed. This is Brantly’s sermon—the testimony and exhortation of a man who has just lost his lover and friend. Although he himself is not here to receive a lenitive from any comfort you may receive, he no longer needs one, for he has joined his wife in Christ’s presence. However, you are still here—and so is his sermon, inviting you “to behold a bush that burns, and is not consumed because God is there.”⁹

⁸ William T. Brantly, *The Lenitive of Sorrow. A Sermon, Delivered in the First Baptist Church, Beaufort, (S. C.) 25th Oct. 1818, on the Death of Mrs. Ann Brantly, Who Departed This Life the 15th of the Same Month* (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1819), 6, 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

A Sermon.

“WHAT? SHALL WE RECEIVE GOOD AT THE HAND OF GOD,
AND SHALL WE NOT RECEIVE EVIL?”
Job ii. 10.

The recital of private sorrow in this place would be an unjustifiable intrusion upon your precious time, were it not for the hope I have, that others may be comforted “with the same comfort wherewith God has comforted” me in my affliction. Being, as a minister of Christ, set for the defense of the gospel, and entrusted with a solemn charge in relation to your spiritual welfare, it becomes my duty to embrace every proper occasion to enforce by precept and example the word of eternal truth. Smitten as I have been by the hand of the Lord, silence might be thought insensibility, and clamorous grief would be rebellion against his sovereignty. What then is more becoming than for me to speak and vindicate the conduct of divine providence towards me? True, you have seen my feeble nature almost sinking under the pressure of that awful calamity which God has laid upon me; you have seen me pouring forth many tears, while compelled to read that roll of lamentation which records the woes recently inflicted on my bereaved family; yet I trust it has been only the salutary bleeding of a wound, and not the rankling of a malignant disease. It has been the spontaneous anguish of a heart lacerated by the sudden rending of the thousand cords that bound it to one object, and not the conflict of a reluctant spirit. It is not the mere impulse of duty that urges me to acknowledge that “it is in faithfulness that God has afflicted me,” but an approving sense of his visitation, which however adverse to my earthly felicity, is yet in its sanctified uses the pledge of a glorious inheritance. To exhibit properly the passive virtues of the Christian character, requires more spirituality and heavenly-mindedness than I possess; and is perhaps one of the most difficult exercises to which we can be called; yet it may not be presumptuous in me to invite you to behold a bush that burns, and is not consumed because God is there, to hear the cry of one who raises his voice from the depths, and to view the dejection of

one who strives to rise by faith in the Redeemer. Should the Lord speak to any of you out of the darkness with which he has covered my habitation, should He make the prostration of my temporal hopes, the means of inciting you to the pursuit of a better life, such an event would be regarded among the chief lenitives of existing pain, and would be a prevailing inducement, to a more unreserved submission.

While, therefore, you are invited to turn your eyes for a moment to the desolation which reigns in my house, do not imagine that it is merely with a view to exact a painful tribute from your friendly sympathies; but rather that you may accompany me while walking through this deep solitude, that we may receive the salutary impressions excited by such a scene. It would be unkind to call you to the house of mourning if you could receive there nothing to compensate the distressing effect of attendance. But, if you listen, amidst the deep gloom, you will hear the language of a most persuasive eloquence, setting forth the value of eternal things, and powerfully refuting extravagant calculations for this life. If you attentively view each mournful circumstance, you will see, as I trust, I have done, the hand of God writing vanity on your dearest joys, and pointing to that abode, where there is “fullness of joy and pleasures forever more.” If you here ruminate, you will feel the forcible conviction of your guilt, you will ascertain the cause and cure of all your woe; you will see wisdom and mercy in those trying dispensations, which may afflict you as being in the flesh, and the ways of the Lord will appear vindicated from every suspicion of inequality.

In the most trying and disastrous circumstances of our life, we should never fail to remember that God is just, whether we rejoice or mourn. No derangement in our plans of life, no destruction of our fairest earthly hopes, can in the least invalidate the equality of Heaven. God is entitled to our gratitude for the good which he bestows, and to our submissive reverence under the evil which he inflicts. For that which bears the semblance of calamity is not always really such, and that which is congenial with our desires is not always good. By a perverse method of judging, we confound the most important and necessary distinctions, for we

are prone to call evil good, and good evil; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; darkness for light, and light for darkness. We should, consequently, cheerfully surrender to Him the right of deciding every question that may have a bearing upon our future welfare. We should view in the spirit of filial obedience the whole course of his discipline, and trust in Him though he slay us.

The spirit in which Job uttered the text, deserves our attentive consideration. He had drunk the waters of a full cup, and was encircled with bereavement and sorrow. His wife, who evinces sentiments that have often actuated the men of the world, urged him to put an end to his miseries by an act of rebellion against God, and of destruction to himself. He fixes his negative upon the baneful suggestion, and with a firmness which only piety could sustain, defends the conduct of providence towards him, and repels the destructive insinuation. “What? Shall we only acknowledge those parts of the divine administration good which happen to favor our present interests and inclinations? In judging what is best for us, shall we usurp the prerogatives of God, and reject what his infinite wisdom and mercy prescribe?” The text furnishes a convincing reason for the patient endurance of affliction. **The good which we accept at the hand of the Lord, should reconcile us to the evil which he may send upon us; and our cheerful acceptance of what we deem good, should lay us under an obligation to accept what we esteem evil.** We, who have been refreshed with the streams of consolation, should not take it ill, when called to taste the salutary bitterness of paternal correction.

First, a portion of affliction is necessarily incident to the dispensations of mercy. It would be extremely presumptuous in us to say the Lord could not so order the dispensation of mercy, as to exclude from it those severities with which it is usually attended; that He could not so soften all that is rigorous, and so sweeten all that is bitter, as to exempt us from the pain of our probation. But as He has not condescended to make such an order, we may affirm that “many are the afflictions of the righteous;” that “through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of

heaven;" that although trouble be not the spontaneous growth of the earth, yet our nature is a soil in which it springs up with a rank luxuriance, that our constitution, both bodily and mental, combines and nourishes the elements of sorrow; and that, however limited our inheritance of other things may be, we must nevertheless inherit a large amount of pain.—Thus, in addition to what we have to endure as Christians, we have also to suffer as other men. We have to undergo the calamities entailed upon our species, to feel the various sensations of misery, which the world must experience as the fruit of sin, and to mingle our weeping with those who mourn under the ruins of a fallen state.

Notwithstanding this, it may surprise some of us, to be informed that any measure of our sorrow should be necessary, while we enjoy the benignity and special pity of the Lord. The dispensation of mercy invariably meditates a triumph over the power of sin. It is arranged and executed upon such principles of sacred energy, as must ensure its final conquest overall opposing interests. In our corrupt hearts there is an opposing interest. Enmity against God, revolt against His authority, the corruption of depraved affections, and the spirit of the world are visible in all we do. Principles of evil so blended with our whole nature, are not to be eradicated without many a pang. Mercy contemplates the gradual expulsion of these enemies of our peace, and in accomplishing its designs, makes us acquainted not only with their malignant nature, but also with the afflictive consequences in which they will ultimately involve us. The consequences of sin may be viewed in the dismal extent of human wretchedness; and we may trace its progress in the long detail of lamentations which the breaking hearts of others have uttered. But we know little of affliction while it stands in the distance of speculation. All that we may have believed as to the effects of transgression in the affliction of others, is cold theory in comparison of what we must feel, when we see the ravages of disease and death amidst the tenderest objects of our affection; when we see the bloom of those faces which have cheered us with smiles, succeeded by a deadly paleness; the joys of youth and the expectations of declining years wither in an instant; when the sweetness of the heart, and the

intelligence of the mind are torn from us, and we are left to utter in sadness, "lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." If we never knew before we must know under such circumstances, that sin is the cause of our calamity, and should therefore be the object of our abhorrence.

It is not affirmed that affliction is the only, nor yet the principal method, by which the Lord is pleased to promote the sanctification of his people; but it is certainly a subject on which much stress is laid in the Scriptures—as having a purifying influence. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. I have refined thee as silver is refined, and tried thee as gold is tried. He is a refiner and purifier of his people. 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. Our light affliction worketh for us far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Contrition produced by many sorrows, is necessary to crush the root of bitterness within us. When we assign a secondary power to other means, we do not question the power of divine grace to effect our meetness for heaven. The progress of grace, however, usually lies through tribulation; through the fire and through the water; through the wilderness overspread with horrors and asperities; through tempests which frown with an indignant aspect and utter a tremendous voice; over mountains which succeed each other in dreadful order; under the blackness of impending skies; through the floods which often lift up their voices attended with the fury of waterspouts; and over the stormy sea, where many sink to rise no more.

The troubles incident to this life, are requisite to demonstrate to us the difference between earth and heaven. As we are in a state of preparation for the felicities of a higher scene, what can be more reasonable than that we should be made to pant for the approaching bliss? To be denied a tranquil abode here, will greatly excite our anxious desire for the rest which remains for the people of God. To see that an incurable taint of mortality has seized all our pleasures here, will prompt the desire expressed by the Psalmist—"O, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly

away and be at rest. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." To see friends dearer than life torn from our bleeding bosoms, while we are left "in all the death of woe," must greatly heighten our apprehensions and desires of that society which is cemented by the ties of an everlasting fraternity. The tears of anguish which flow in all the passage of this dreary vale, must endear us to the anticipation of that time, when the Redeemer's hand shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; when sorrow and sighing shall no more break the harmony of the soul, nor occasions of grief depress the happy spirit.

Troubles have a very decided influence in developing our interior character. The variations in our external condition must necessarily act upon different dispositions of our nature. If we were destined to pass on in one uniform tenor, without ever experiencing any vicissitudes of circumstance, many of the traits, in the qualities of our mind might remain unobserved. In the smoothness of such a course, the mild and the impetuous feelings would not be alternately called into action, but we should become habituated to one class of emotions, and should be very little known either to ourselves or others. The way through which the Lord leads us, therefore, is calculated to humble and prove us, and to exhibit the diversified properties of our nature. We often see the fluid, which in a settled state appeared to the eye of a beholder perfectly transparent, become turbid and impure when suddenly shaken; such is the heart. In the time of prosperous tranquility it may seem measurably free from the more depraved affections, but under the agitations of sorrow, and the assaults of temptation, a base and loathsome sediment will arise to pollute all that we had considered fair and good. But trials do not create these mortifying realities of indwelling sin, they only serve as tests to bring to view that which our hearts previously contained. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." While troubles reveal many surprising defects in our disposition, they also display the foundation on which we build for heaven. As we can better determine the firmness of any structure after it has been tried by the storm, so we may more clearly understand the stability of our Christian confidence, after we have passed through the conflicts of

grief. It is our consolation to know, that the "heaviness of manifold," yet needful "temptations" results in such a "trial of our faith as is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, and will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." With Job then we may say, "when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." And with the Apostle, "we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

The severe discipline of woe is important, as it improves the essential principle in our religious character. This is sympathy. To weep with them that weep, is an interesting and tender part of our duty. He who is easily touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who having suffered himself, is able to succor the tempted, is the great pattern of Christian sympathy. He was made perfect through suffering, and from his deep experience in affliction, has become the partner of his people's woe. We must share in each other's grief, and by dividing the stream into many channels, its violence will be diminished: by rendering the burden common to many, its pressure on one will be lessened. But how are we to be trained to this community of tears and mourning? What lessons most clearly teach this doctrine of commiseration? Who are the persons best qualified to join themselves to those who are carried along on the swelling surface of sorrow, to calm the growing billows? What hand shall gently touch the wound that bleeds in its earliest anguish, and shall apply the salutary balm? What voice shall utter the first accents of comforts? To such questions we naturally reply, "Bring to our relief those who have trodden the same path before us. Let that eye of tenderness view us, which has already streamed at the sight of its own calamity; let that hand minister to us which has wiped the tear of its own affliction; let that voice address us which has been attuned to the sound of lamentation." We may accordingly conclude, that when the Lord directs our course through the furnace of trouble, he intends so to refine our friendly sympathies as to provide for the future trials and necessities of other members of his family by

preparing us to comfort them. When he lays his hand upon us to press us down into the dust of mourning, he is preparing support for some “bruised reed” which is to tremble before the approaching tempest. When he causes “the shadow of death” to rest upon the eye-lids of those who have attracted our warmest affections, he is viewing with a benignant eye, the future trials of such as are to say with the prophet, “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins. He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunk with wormwood.”

The Father of mercies would never blend with His gracious dispensation inexpedient severities. Hence by observing the character which His people has sustained, and the exercises by which they have been distinguished, we may learn what is indispensable to the administration of mercy. Isaiah calls them, “the broken hearted,” “the captives,” “the dwellers among ashes,” mourners, who have “the spirit of heaviness,” the “afflicted, tossed with tempests and not comforted.” In Zephaniah, they are called an afflicted and poor people, who trust in the name of the Lord. Our blessed Lord denominates them, “the poor in spirit,” and mourners. The apostle in referring to the choice of Moses, explicitly states what his expectations were on entering the society of God’s people. “He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” We must expect a similar lot; if we are children we must be corrected; if we are gold we must be tried and refined. Our song of mercy must be often accompanied with the more affecting notes of judgment. The provision for our pilgrimage is combined with bitter herbs. The religion which we profess requires daily self-denial; the spirit by which we are led, encounters a perpetual conflict from the spirit of sin; the world through which we pass, retains and exerts a deadly hate against our peace; the powers of darkness, from which we are rescued, continue to fight against us; our robes are not washed and made white in the blood of the lamb

without great tribulation; the cross by which we are crucified to the world, was the scene of ignominious suffering, and the Savior whom we follow was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. But let us not presume from this view, that the ways of God are grievous, and that our pain rises above our comfort, for . . .

Secondly, a view of the good which we receive from the Lord will reconcile us to all that is apparently evil. The acts of divine providence constitute one grand system. That system is not understood by a superficial acquaintance with any of its parts. Should we presumptuously divide it and form our judgment according to the character of distinct portions without referring what might appear unequal in these to the harmony of the great whole, we should incur the dreadful risk of charging God foolishly and of rebelling against the kind orders of His government. Such is our infatuation, that we are inclined to call nothing good, which does not subserve our present welfare, and to fix the imputation of evil upon all that may be attended with a present affliction. But this method of deciding on the events of our history, is as much repugnant to the interests of our souls, as it is to the honor and glory of God. Could we at present comprehend the final results of all those arrangements of providence, which seem to us so complicated and mysterious, we should perceive the amazing operations which now confound our reason; all tending to one point, and bearing upon one object. Our admiring faculties would perceive all that apparent chaos of present darkness and confusion, glowing with the luster of eternity, and moving in perfect harmony with the happiness of the righteous, and with the holiness of God. This assertion is authorized by the express declarations of Scripture. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Mark the perfect man and behold the upright.” Though now you see him bending under a load of affliction and infirmity, lifting up his eyes on the perpetual desolations which surround him, disappointed in his hopes, thrown down from his elevation of earthly happiness; though now you see him “sowing in tears,” destitute and sorrowful, hanging his harp on the willows, while he

sits by the rivers of Babylon, under all the sadness of an exile from his home; though now you hear the deep strains of his plaintive song, and see him in the agony of a fearful conflict, yet mark! the end of that man is peace. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.” Though all men should unite in charging injustice upon God, yet would the heavens attest His equity. When He shall come in judgment, “the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself.”

We can lose nothing which did not emanate from divine munificence. The gratuity of heaven, and that only, makes bereavement a possible state to us. The Lord gives before he takes away. We never think of deprecating His gifts, but on the contrary, seize them with all the eagerness of desire. But our wicked hearts often pervert His blessings, and render even his favors calamitous; still we never think of shuddering, when we see the full hand of His bounty extended to us. The corrections of His hands are salutary, yet, when we feel His chastisement, how do we tremble and fear, and ask, if “his mercy is clean gone forever?” This is the effect of our infirmity. For let us compare the kind acts of the Lord to us, with those which may seem to have an opposite tendency. The apostle has anticipated us in the result of such a comparison: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” What we now suffer, is no more in comparison of ultimate felicity, than the transient flash of a meteor to the brightness of an eternal sun! than a single night to the duration of a day that shall never intermit its splendor! than a single paroxysm of anguish, to “the perpetuity of bliss!” What is taken from us is removed but for a moment; what is given us in Christ, remains more firm than heaven and earth. What fades before the pressing avidity of our hopes was death-struck, before it became an object of our pursuit; what the Lord offers to our aspiring view, is fruit plucked from the tree of life. Does the grave exact a tribute from the dear treasures of affection and friendship, which are deposited deep in our hearts? It only takes what can and must die. It leaves unhurt the sublime intellect, the amiable soul—the soaring spirit, which shall triumph through the blood of the Lamb. So, for all the possibilities of our

sorrow, there is some overpowering recompense the splendor of which throws a brightness over the contracted shadow. Do the afflictions of a moment press upon our throbbing hearts? They are borne down into insignificance, by that stupendous weight of glory which shall burst upon the sight. Do we live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, traversing the thorny desert, and bearing the marks of woe? We plainly declare, that we seek a better country; that our eye is fixed on the glowing regions of the heavenly Canaan. Are we the companions of those who weep; and associates of those who humble themselves under the mighty hand of God? We look to the period, when “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, forever and ever.”

How large is the sum of the divine bounty to us! The Lord daily loads us with benefits. He crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercy. He pours His blessings upon us in streams of varied beneficence. He gives us the light of life, sustains our sinking frame amidst the innumerable infirmities of nature; preserves us from the pestilence that walks in darkness, and from the destruction that wastes at noon-day. He waits to be gracious to us, blots out the thick cloud of our transgressions, restores our souls; spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us; enriches us with the knowledge of salvation; guides us through life by His counsel and afterward receives us to glory.

And how can we say that sorrow is an evil?—unless it be an evil for our hearts to be directed to another world; unless it be an affliction to see and feel the loathsomeness of sin; to know the treachery of our depraved nature; to have relaxed our eager hold on the present, and to have confirmed our hope of the future life; to be driven from the bubbles which float on the stream, nearer to the fountain; to be drawn away from the perishing vanities of sense to the durable riches and solid joys of religion—unless it be an affliction to be made more conversant with death, and the issues from death; to be urged to the contemplation of that state, where we must have an unchangeable and everlasting abode; unless these things be grievous, it will be unjust to call sanctified afflictions evil. On the other hand, how can we call that really good, which

alienates our soul from God, and the life to come; which adds keenness to the pain of disappointment, implicates in vanity the nobler energies of the soul, pierces us through with many sorrows, and leaves us cleaving to the dust? As the blessing of God is requisite to change the character of our sufferings, so it is requisite to confer a right character on our joys. We must learn to appreciate things, not according to the imposing promise which they give of present delight; not by the speciousness with which they captivate the senses; nor yet, by the transient pleasures which they offer to the intellect, but rather according to their influence on our everlasting interest, as they stand connected with the world to come; as they have a tendency to make us more holy, and to confirm our hope of heavenly pleasures. By the help of such a criterion, we shall see the threatening darkness of our calamities vanishing into the serenity of bright and cheering prospects; the roughness of our present passage growing even and tranquil; the painful severities of present chastisement, turned into the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Thirdly, that which comes from the hand of the Lord, should be accepted with resignation. The bitter which He gives is far preferable to the most delicious sweets of the world; the frowns of His parental countenance more promote our chief interest, than all the smiles and blandishments of men; the corrections which He inflicts, are of more importance to the soul, than all the glitter of worldly prosperity. To recognize His hand in what we suffer, will greatly alleviate the burden; will repress every murmuring sentiment, and give us quietness in the midst of trouble.—If we be the children of God, His visitation upon our sin and ingratitude, should draw us nearer to Him, that we might see the designs of his providence, and become more acquainted with the measures by which he is pleased to exercise his people. In the happiness of the Christian, there is something infinite; it stretches forward into eternity, and flourishes in the mighty succession of endless ages. And since we can neither augment, nor diminish infinitude, so neither can any temporal considerations increase, or diminish the real felicity of the righteous. The world added to their

possessions, could not enlarge their sphere of glorious vision; the world taken from them, could not lessen their joy; for it rests on God. In nature's convulsions, it is sweet to lean on heaven. In the sudden eclipse of the brightest earthly hopes, it is refreshment to the fainting soul, to raise the eye of faith to that radiance which can receive no accessions from the light of the sun, and which will suffer no loss by its total extinction. The hand of the Lord often lays on His people such troubles, as relate to the bereavements of the present life. But even before He does this, He so enriches them with a hope of the final recompense of the just, that they are too happy to allow a protracted grief under the most trying losses. We are extremely incompetent judges of what is necessary and expedient for us. Our eager hands are extended to catch every passing shadow while the substance is neglected. Our unsated appetites burn with restless ardor for larger supplies of that noxious food which reduces the vital action of the soul, and gives it a sickly constitution. We bind ourselves by innumerable ties to those objects, which must press down the spirit, and leave it under clogs and fetters, that resist all its sacred motions. Since therefore, we decide so injuriously for ourselves, we should not be reluctant to yield our assent to the determinations of the Lord; to approve the choice which He may make for us; to receive the prescription, though bitter, which He directs for our diseased souls; to pursue the path, though a thorny maze, which He requires us to tread.

The manifestation of the eternal hand in our painful experiences, should silence the tumult of our fears. The tempest may be dark and angry, but if God be there it will soon pass over. The furnace may have unexampled heat, but His presence will stay the destructive violence of the fire, and enable us to pass through unhurt. The enemy may present a formidable array, but under the conduct of our conquering Redeemer, we shall be more than victorious. The night of sorrow may be deep and dreadful, but joy will come with the morning. In all our straits we may expect a speedy issue, if His hand be seen ordering our conversation. He will make a way for us to escape from the most perplexed and intricate circumstances. When we are brought so near to the precipice, that an evasion of it may appear to us, impossible, He

will open unexpected passages through the great waters, that we may behold His salvation, and pass through without injury. He can render the secret place of thunder, the means of teaching us the lessons of reverence and submission.

And should we see the hand of a father offering us a bitter cup, could we possibly doubt its healing efficacy? That hand which has plucked us as brands from the burning, which has fed us all our life long; that hand which has borne us up when we were sinking into darkness and despair; which has poured comforts on us in a thousand different forms; which has crushed our enemies, and pointed to eternal triumphs, will not press upon our acceptance, that which will be ultimately grievous. In the past kindness of His dispensation we have a pledge of the benignity of all His future acts and discipline.

The interposition of Jehovah's hand is the token of sovereignty. In our abasement and dejection, He makes known His supremacy, displays His righteous prerogatives, and asserts His pleasure. He can raise up or He can make low; He can encompass our path with darkness, or can spread over it a light that improves into perfect day. It is His to cast down from the highest earthly eminence; to break asunder those that are at ease, and to comfort and exalt the lowly and contrite. He causes the most signal vicissitudes in the circumstances of His people, that they may see and acknowledge his authority over them. Hence, His ways are not to be questioned, but vindicated, since "he doeth his pleasure in the armies above and amongst the inhabitants of the earth beneath."—The period for our patience is elapsing with great rapidity, and the time for exultation rolls on with speed. All the springs of tribulation will soon be exhausted; the eye which now appears in the languor of grief, will have shed its last tear, and the tottering steps of weary pilgrims will take hold on the portals of glory. We, who now weep, shall shortly be "as though we wept not;" and we, who have seen our dearest friends languishing into life, and brightening into higher felicity, shall soon be associated with their holy raptures. That interval which now separates us and presents such an unwelcome horror to our apprehensions, is a narrow valley; it is only by the intervention of this, that we are

precluded from their society. Shortly we shall pass it, and dark as it may be, we shall there descry the footsteps of the Redeemer; there we shall see the monuments of His victory, and thence shall follow Him to His rest.

The considerations which have now been adduced and urged, are in some respects applicable to all of us; but the consoling and encouraging views belong exclusively to the children of God. Our subject, my brethren, lifts up a warning voice; it pleads the cause of God; it furnishes the best motives to resignation, and resolves our doubts by the certainties of eternity.

You who now glide on the smooth surface of prosperity, look forward to the days of darkness, for they are many. This mild atmosphere, and these serene heavens will not always continue. There is a distant frown on your horizon, which ere long will gather the conflicting elements into a dismal tempest. You cannot escape the day which shall be ushered in by inward terrors and outward commotions; which instead of diffusing the cheering light, shall present a firmament of blackness, and the earth clad in sackcloth. Neither can you suspend those established revolutions which are bringing to you the night of sorrow. To every one is an allotted measure of evil; and as certainly as you now accept good at the hand of God, you must accept evil. You must know what it is to weep; you must become conversant with tears and groans. To think of shunning these, is as vain as to expect that the laws of nature and providence will be repealed. You must see and deplore the ravages of death and the progress of mortality. The expressive countenance, the engaging form, the attractive person of the tenderest relatives, will shortly present to the eye only a little dust of moldering bones. Do not indulge the idle presumption that the best preparation for approaching disasters is to shut your eyes against the light which reveals them. Look calmly at your destiny, and be prepared to meet it. It will be your wisdom to consider your latter end. Ascertain now the purposes of heaven in that evil, which is incident to your state; view it in all its grand and sublime tendencies; consider its benevolent aspect on your future welfare; and thus let your hearts be fortified against the trying day.

You must henceforth yield your assent to the righteous decisions of infinite wisdom, and to the equitable acts of unerring providence. You cannot deny that fullness of testimony which proves the goodness of the Lord to have been the source of all your satisfactions. The case then, with you, must be resolved into this: you must either accept all He gives, or else abjure all dependence upon Him. Between these points there is no intermediate position, no possible alternative; for if you can entrust to His care the distribution of favors, you must entrust to His wisdom and mercy the infliction of needful sorrow. And who of you is prepared to withdraw His dependence from the Lord? Who is ready to forsake the rock and plunge himself into the devouring flood? Who is prepared to throw from his hands the gifts of a bountiful providence? Who will be so presumptuous as to say, "I will contract no more obligations to God, I will accept no more of His favors?" If such a course be absurd and impious in the extreme, so that you shudder at the very supposition; recollect that it is not less impious and extravagant to decline the acceptance of what may appear to be evil. For the hand which bestows abundance also causes want; the mercy which gave us friends takes them from us; the bounty which diffuses blessings resumes what it had bestowed.

Such are the reasons for resignation furnished by the views of this subject. But, perhaps, we are not able yet like the apostle, "to glory in tribulations." We are only pupils in that school of suffering, through all the fiery gradations of which he had passed with such distinguished honor. Here we must long remain in the capacity of learners. By successive instructions from the intimations of providence, we attain a limited proficiency in the happy art of submission; but after all, how defective are our acquirements on this subject! The Lord rends asunder the cords which binds us to the object of our affection, yet we cleave to others with an excess of fondness equal to that which He has so awfully reprov'd. Though by causing the streams which absorbed our affection and care to become dry, He invites us to come even to the fountain, yet we vainly rove in pursuit of other streams, equally fallacious and engrossing. Still prone to the earth, leaning upon a treacherous prop, and seeking a vital joy among the dead,

we languish in the remoteness of a painful exile from our father's house.

You who have read the volume of grief, who have seen the animated forms which had long enlivened your solitude receding from your embrace into the silence and darkness of the tomb, learn to commit your interests to God, "what time you are afraid to trust in him." Think of the time when, of all the objects which His hand has made tributary to your present comfort, not one shall be left to impart a sensation of joy; when every ray of earthly delight shall be extinguished, and the earth and skies shall be unable to give relief to your troubled spirit. Think of the certain and rapid approach of such a time, and learn to thirst for the streams of a purer bliss, and seek for happiness in God. Do you entertain doubts as to the final issues of those wonderful arrangements, the operation of which the Lord is directing? Let your doubts vanish before the strong and steady light which eternity casts upon your dark forebodings. See the day of your redemption drawing near, and the realities approaching, which shall present a full solution for all existing difficulties. View with consolatory emotions, the future scene of blessedness for the righteous. No shade of woe shall ever rest on those happy mansions.—The countenance of a complacent Savior shall spread enduring ecstasies, and the song of perpetual praise shall circulate through all the heavenly ranks.

While these representations are presented to you, allow me to apply the sacred balm which they impart to a spirit now lacerated with recent sorrow. Within these few days, your friendly hands have deposited beneath the clouds which surround this house, the partner of my joys and sorrows. Your dejected countenances and streaming eyes have seemed to testify your sense of my severe bereavement. Your sadness demonstrates the magnitude of my loss, and the sobbings which roll on my ear, proclaim aloud my affliction. But these eyes have seen it, this heart has felt it. A last view showed me the hand of decay sweeping the lineaments of that face where affection and intelligence lately glowed. Friendship had breathed its last farewell; the spirit which had gone with me to heaven in devotion

and praise had departed never to return, and I am left a mourner. Yet, let the Lord smite me, it shall be a kindness. He gave me a large amount of happiness in the blessing which He has resumed; and though the pain of separation be the more acute, the public offering of submission should not be the less prompt. I accepted good at His hand, shall I not now accept evil? Let me adore the power which has struck my comfort dead, and see the clear designs of mercy, beaming through this darkness. Let me draw nearer to that Father, who smites but to heal, and breaks but to bind up. Let me hence learn to serve God with an undivided heart, to seek happiness only in Him, to acknowledge Him in all my ways, to turn from the fading scene of nature to the uninterrupted glories of eternity.

My bereavement, brethren, is also the bereavement of this church, of which my deceased companion was an active and prayerful member. We have lost from the house of God, one whose discretion and zeal sought the welfare of Zion, and whose enlarged and elevated views of divine truth, confirmed the faith of the wavering. In this event, the Lord calls us, not to unavailing expressions of deep regret, but to the imitation of those virtues which must yet live in our recollection. The most expressive sorrow for departed friends is a conduct formed on their maxims and examples. Then, shall we grieve aright, when, like them, we follow Christ, and are ready to die the death of the righteous.

Where I now stand, it is scarcely necessary to speak of the Christian excellence of the dear deceased. Her tender sympathies and endearing counsels to the afflicted; her well sustained charity towards all the people of God; her conscientious observance of all the parts of duty; her self-denial and humility; her great love to "the house of prayer;" her punctual attendance on public worship, even under much imperfection of health; her prudence and disinterestedness as a friend; her engaging manner as an associate; her refined taste and vigorous judgment, and her exemplary deportment in all the relations of life, will attest that worth on which circumstances, and an overflowing heart forbid me to enlarge.