

Our Contributors.

SWEETENING THE BITTER THINGS.

BY THE REV. THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

What a fine series of life lessons for the Christian is presented in the journeyings of the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land! Almost every scene illustrates some practical truth or spiritual experience. For example, the Israelites, soon after leaving the Red Sea, and after a weary march over torrid sands, come upon a fountain in the desert. They rush forward eagerly for a refreshing draft. But alas! the first taste is a taste of disappointment; for the waters are so bitter that neither man nor beast can drink them. At once the murmuring multitude give to the unpalatable waters the name of "Marah," which signifies the water of bitterness. There is still more terrible bitterness of disappointment in their hearts. They forget all about their deliverance from the land of bondage and the waves of the Red Sea, and think only of their present troubles. With a mixture of ingratitude and despair they crowd about their leader and cry out, "What shall we drink?"

Now, this exciting scene beside the fountain of Marah finds a parallel in many a chapter of our life experience; and we read of such in the lives of others. Abraham Lincoln was keenly disappointed because he did not win a certain office under President Taylor, and afterward that he was not elected to the United States Senate; but then he might have missed the most exalted station that any American has won in his country. Young Frederick W. Robertson was disappointed because he did not get a commission in the British army; but God had a better place for him in the army of Jesus Christ as the most brilliant preacher in the Church of England. In our own humble experiences we have had some tastes of the waters of Marah. We had set our hearts on some favorite plan or project. Perhaps we were going on a long-coveted tour, and had made all our arrangements. But the day for our departure finds us on a bed of severe sickness, and the medicines we swallow are not as bitter as the disappointment. Selfishness murmurs and chafes under the trial; but presently we begin to discover that the sick bed lay right on the direct road toward Canaan. We begin to talk with our own hearts, and to think over our past lives. We make a fresh covenant with God that if He will restore us to health we will use it for Him and be more fruitful Christians. We take up one precious promise after another and drop it into the fountain of trial, and lo! the bitter waters begin to taste sweeter to us. Prayer becomes sweeter, and Christ's presence sweeter, and something whispers to us, "After all, is not this better for me than the journey to Europe or to California? Is it not good for me that I have been shut in here with my Saviour?"

Now this was just what happened to disappoint murmuring Israel. The Lord showed to Moses a certain tree which when he had cast it into the fountain, the waters were made sweet, and the whole multitude drank of them with delight. We do not read that God created the tree

by a miracle; He simply "showed" it to Moses. So our Heavenly Father does not create a Bible, or an atonement, or a mercy-seat, or the promises, or supplies of grace expressly for us. His Spirit opens our eyes to see them, and our hearts to enjoy them. He reveals to us the tree of healing which turns a draught of bitterness into a draught of holy joy. And so it is that

"Trials make the promise sweet,  
Trials give new life to prayer,  
Bring us to the Saviour's feet,  
Lay us low, and keep us there."

I do not pretend to be a superior scholar in the school of Providence, but many of the best lessons in life have been taught me by disappointment. One lesson we have all learned is that this world was not made and is not managed only for us. If it were, then the sun would shine just when we wanted a fair day, and the rain would fall when our garden needed to be watered. But we have found that God goes right on and orders things as pleaseth Him, without consulting us; and when our plans were thwarted, and a little Marah began to bubble up in our hearts, that stern schoolmaster, Disappointment, said to us, "Don't be selfish. This world was not made for you alone. Your loss is another's gain. The rain that spoiled your new-mown hay made your neighbor's corn grow; the fall in grain or in dry goods that reduced your profits will help yonder poor widow to feed and clothe her children more easily." Wherefore we were reconciled to our losses, and the little Marah began to taste sweeter.

There is not a single person who reads these lines who has not had some bitter cups pressed to his lips. No journey to the heavenly Canaan is trodden without some Marahs on the road. The power and the glory of Christ's grace is in sweetening the draughts. I have often sat down beside a child of God who had in her hand a bitter cup of trial, but the sweet breath of Jesus has turned the bitterness into such a blessing that she tastes the love of Jesus in every drop. Grand old Richard Baxter, after a life of constant suffering, exclaimed, "O my God, I thank Thee for a bodily discipline of eight and fifty years!" That noble and consecrated layman, Harlan Page, of New York, during his last illness, uttered these triumphant words: "A bed of pain is a precious place when we have the presence of Christ. God does not send one unnecessary affliction. Lord, I thank Thee for suffering. I deserve it; let me not complain or dictate. I commit myself to Thee, O Saviour, and to Thy infinite love. I stop my mouth and lie low beside Thee." So did victorious grace build up that blood-redeemed soul faster than disease was pulling down the frail tenement in which it dwelt; and through the rents which coming death was making, Heaven's glory shone in with a rapturous radiance. These were splendid testimonies. I earnestly hope that in many chambers of sickness and houses of sorrow, they may be like the boughs from that tree which Moses plucked and cast into Marah, making the

waters of bitterness sweet to the thirsty drinkers. God knows best:

"All the lessons He shall send,  
Are the sweetest,  
And His training in the end  
Is completest."  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

UNFURL THE SAILS.

It is told of J. Hudson Taylor, the founder of China Inland Mission, that when on a sailing vessel on his first trip to China, the ship struck a dead calm off the shores of the Cannibal Islands, and were slowly drifting. The savages were expecting a great feast. The captain came to Mr. Taylor, and besought to pray God for help, and he agreed to do so if the captain would set his sails to catch the breeze. Objection was made to this proposition, the captain declining to make himself a laughing stock by unfurling the sails in a dead calm. Finally, however, he decided that he would prepare the sails. It was done. In the statefroom Mr. Taylor was praying, when a knock came to the door, and the captain said, "You had better stop praying, for we have as much wind now as we can manage." Sure enough the wind came when they were but a few hundred yards from the Cannibal shore. Let us have a good ship, let us pray God for favorable breezes, but let us lift our sails in expectancy. Let us hold the doctrines, let us show them practical, let us be democratic, let us depend upon God, and let us be constantly at work, and then we may expect a continual revival.

—The *Advance* is authority for the statement that Greater New York, taken as a whole, has a saloon for each 380 of its population, and a church for each 3,800, while there are certain wards in the city with a saloon for each 180 inhabitants, and one church only for each 10,000.

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