

## THE CLOUD WITH A SILVER LINING

By Rev. W. E. Smith

Of all the psalms that David wrote, and I believe he wrote many, there is none that touches the heart so deeply and plays upon so many chords of tender sentiment as the 23rd Psalm. This has been called the Universal Psalm; everybody knows it by heart. Everybody loves it. The little child learns to lisp its sweet declarations of loving confidence at its mother's knee, or in its early days in Sunday School. And as the Christian grows in years and meets all the diversified experiences of joy, and sorrow, failure, and success, sickness and health, this psalm still holds, not only a lasting place in his memory, but hidden deep in the heart it becomes a perennial source of comfort and inspiration. How beautifully it yields its self to music! The words fall naturally into stanzas and the spirit of the psalm is re-echoed in the chorus attached;

"His yoke is easy; His burden is light;  
I've found it so; I've found it so;  
He leadeth me by day and by night  
Where living waters flow."

This psalm breathes the spirit of determined confidence, calm restfulness, healing mercy, bold assurance, deepest satisfaction, and exultant hope; and this all because the Lord is My Shepherd. There is not a grain of cynicism, gloomy foreboding or feelings of frustration in this song. The singer is singing in no minor key but is exulting in the goodness of God. His mercies, his provision and protection all add up to a sum which can only be expressed in the language of God's arithmetic—"Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think".

But there is one verse which especially claims my attention at this time. "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Here we have an intimation of the darker shades of life. It does not refer to that final experience called death. This is not a reference to death itself, but to those dark experiences when the clouds hang low and the shadows deepen on some lonely path along which the oriental shepherd often had to lead his sheep.

There is holy optimism all through this psalm but not that of the pollyanna kind that sings, "Pack all your troubles in an old kit bag and smile, smile, smile." There is no real faith in such an attitude because there is no real God in it. This springs from a superficial buoyancy of spirit. You may try to pack your troubles in an old kit-bag but they are hard to pack. They won't stay in. The soul that has not learned to cast his burden on the Lord has to carry his troubles and disappointments day and night, and to be obsessed by an unaccountable and inexplicable fear of the dark things ahead, or a dark experience upon which he has already entered. The sad thing is that under all the hilarity of modern sports, social entertainment, political wrangling and business activity, there is often a subtle and harassing fear, and this must, more or less, be the state of that one who has not abandoned the program he once made for his life and has yielded himself to the complete control of Christ the Good Shepherd of his soul.

The writer of this psalm does not deny the reality of suffering, sorrow, losses, and crosses, from which no life can be wholly

exempt. But he does believe, and he does not whisper it apologetically as if he only half believes it, he sings it and shouts it, that life is an eternal good to those whose lives are under the leadership of Christ, who can make all things work together for good to them that love God. This was O. T. philosophy as well as new.

We talk about the fear of death; it requires far more courage to live than it does to die. Death is often the result of a mental derangement, and a soul depression that killed all hope. They have said if there is a hell it can't be worse than what I am now enduring. Poor old Job was not the object of his wife's pity and comfort, but the object of her scorn and derision. She as much as said "You old fool you are still praising God and see how He has used you! Property all gone, children all gone and now you are all over sores. I wish you would die and get out of my sight and the last thing I should like to hear from your lips would be a curse". Yes, this is all there in her advice to Job.

But she couldn't get rid of Job so easily as that. Job saw in life a real GOOD. True he was going through the valley of the shadow but he could shout: "Though he slay me yet will I trust Him". Yes, there is a faith which sings in the darkest night. Though clouds are round about us, yet in the wholly sanctified soul there is no room for a doubt of the ultimate goodness of God to find a place. Suggestions to doubt may and will come. They come amid the sunshine and the prosperity of life. If there is carnality in the heart that is the thing which would make one feel that God is not always good and just in the administration of his providences. Faith cannot always give a present adequate reason, for no chastening for the present may seem to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. Thank God there is a light in the soul that shines down through the way of sorrow and temptation into the larger and better day! To Christ, Gethsemane was the valley and the shadow of death. It meant agony of soul but ended with a shout of victory, "Not my will but Thine be done." "For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross despising the shame. He loved righteousness and hated iniquity therefor God anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows."

The great cry today is for security. But how uncertain is our security from the human standpoint! Health, property, friends and loved ones may soon be taken. I visit quite regularly two former parishioners. One brother is nearly my own age. For years he has been prostrate with a most painful condition of arthritis. I have carried him on my heart every day. When away I sent him cards to let him know that I remembered him in loving sympathy. When I came back from vacation I found him in a very pitiable state. They had propped him up on the side of the bed one day, when he pitched forward cutting his eye and breaking his collar bone. But when he told me of his trust in God he had to shout it. "Glory to God, Tell Brother Palmer (he is the other helpless man I visit) that the anchor holds. Though He slay me yet will I trust Him."

This is always my philosophy. No real evil can befall us if we trust fully in God! I have had a little opportunity in the last ten years to prove whether this is only a head-theory or a heart-affirmation. Yes, there are trials ahead

and harder tests perhaps than ever; but the Cross is not greater than His Grace." I have a little song I play and sing to God in my devotions:

"Great is Thy faithfulness Oh God my father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou art the same, Thy compassion ne'er  
faileth;

What Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

"Summer and winter, springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;  
Join, with all nature in manifold witness,

To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

"Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Presence to help, and Thy Spirit to guide;  
Strength for today and glad hope for the  
morrow—

Blessings are mine and ten thousand be-  
side."

Chorus:

Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy  
faithfulness:

There is no shadow of turning with Thee.

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,

Great is Thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

—W. E. S.

## OUR CHRISTMAS SINGING

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much church singing if Christian people could be inspired and challenged by a sense of their mission, and the possibilities of this ministry.

THE POWER OF SACRED SONG IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP is also seen in the Christmas story. Note the words immediately following the text: "And it came to pass when the angels were gone away." The words which follow tell of shepherds rising up at the close of the Christmas service, hastening to seek the Saviour. May we not rightly conclude that the song of the heavenly host, as well as the message of the angel preacher, helped to make them seekers for the Christ

Let all who join in the singing of Christmas hymns and carols, realize the possibility of their singing and their songs. Your prayerful, worshipful and purposeful singing may influence someone to seek the Saviour. The same may be true at all times.

E. W. T.

## A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

We are happy as we sing  
On the birthday of our King.  
We're so glad that Christ was born  
On a holy Christmas morn.

Every year his love grows sweeter  
All along this pilgrim way.  
We could never live without Him  
Who was born on Christmas Day.

Whether we have much to give  
Or whether much receive,  
We bless the Lord, one and all,  
On happy Christmas Eve.

We thank thee, Lord, for our church  
And fellowship so dear;  
Just keep us in thy tender love  
And we need never fear.

We thank Thee most for Jesus  
And Eternal Life, so sure  
For those who walk the narrow way  
And are willing to endure.

—Beulah Spears