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P A T I E N C E .

BY

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"Let patience have her perfect work."—James i. 4.  
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following meditations on Patience, though once delivered in substance to a Christian assembly, were written as a pastoral gift to an esteemed friend, who had been more than two years confined to her dwelling by a dangerous, lingering, and sometimes exceedingly painful malady. May the good Lord carry his truth with a blessing to other chambers of trial!

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P A T I E N C E .

SOME words which are often in our mouths are, nevertheless, but little understood ; and some virtues which we are continually praising, are hardly ever put in practice. This is as true of patience as of any thing else. Every man needs it, every man knows he would be the better for it, yet every man falls short of it. This, I suppose, was one reason why the apostle James teaches so emphatically concerning it,

“ Let patience have her perfect work.” James i. 4.

It would seem that the “ twelve tribes scattered abroad,” to whom this apostle wrote, were in trials and needed comfort. For the very first words

of his letter are as if he stood over them and said, *Be of good cheer!* "My brethren," says he, "count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations," *i. e.*, *trials*. These troubles tried their faith (v. 3,) and "untried faith is uncertain faith." The result of these trials of faith is *patience*. The very word is derived from "suffering,"* and if there were no pain there could be no patience. If then patience is good, trials are good. And the great caution to be observed under such dispensations is, that we lose not the fulness of the benefit; that we content not ourselves with half the mercy; that we stop not short of the entire grace; for we may suffer and yet not profit; therefore, says the inspired teacher, "Let patience have her *perfect work*."

* In Latin *patientia*, from *patior*.

I. *Patience* is a certain temper of mind under suffering. As we all are appointed to suffer, and some of us to suffer greatly and suffer long, we should do well to learn more of this heavenly art, concerning which so much good is spoken in Scripture.

In its simplest form, patience is a calm and unshaken state of mind, strongly bearing up against a present burden of distress. This may exist without religion. A Stoic or a western savage may endure pain without a murmur. Malefactors have stoutly faced the torments of their penal death. In respect to this, the natural temperament of human beings differs. Some can naturally bear more than others. They have more rigid fibre, or less shrinking nerves, more robust health, or smaller sensibility. The degree of pain is to be measured, not by the

force of the blow, but the power of resistance. That which would crush a reed shall leave no mark upon an oak. When pain comes, however, it is well if we have even natural means of enduring it. But practice, discipline, and exercise add vastly even to this natural fortitude. Fresh soldiers and new recruits quail and fly, but the veteran has looked death in the face. He who has endured once, can endure again. Still more efficacious is the operation of inward principle, adding moral motives to the barely natural power. Education has this for part of its work, to teach the young to bear some burdens, not to fall back at every alarm, nor cry out at every pang. Stern determination will help one to sustain what might at first have seemed intolerable. This is remarkably the case in great and sudden pangs of an-

guish, for which a resolved mind has prepared itself.

Though pains of mind are worse than pains of body, they also may be endured by some with hardihood and tranquillity, and this we call fortitude, and in some circumstances patience. By great skill and self-control in managing the thoughts and detaching the attention from distressing objects, some are able, to a degree which at first might seem impracticable, to keep up quietude, self-possession, and even a show of cheerfulness, under complicated bereavements, mortifications, and griefs. All this may enter into the Christian's patience; but all this falls infinitely short of its "perfect work."

Christian patience adds to this a sweet, childlike resignation to God's holy will, in the affliction, whatever it may be. All merely natural or phi-

losophical patience is cold, gloomy, sullen, and unprofitable. Though it may refrain from tears, it cannot smile; for it hath no faith, no love, no Saviour, no covenant, no God! Christian patience “endures, as seeing Him who is invisible;” that is faith. Heb. xi. 1. It looks up to the rod in the hand of a chastening Father. Heb. xii. 6. It considers One that endured such contradiction against himself, and arms itself with the same mind. 1 Pet. iv. 1. It beholds every pang disposed according to a covenant transaction. 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. And it bows to all, however distressing, as ordered by the infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness. Lam. iii. 37—40. Therefore it is, that the stoutest and hardest of worldly sufferers falls so far below the feeblest of Christ’s lambs, when laid under heavy trials. Though pangs of

anguish must now and then extort a sigh, tear, or groan, the child of God still turns to him, when smitten, and kisses the paternal hand. It is again *faith*, believing that God doth it, and that all he doth is wisest and is best. It is *submission*, yielding the neck to the yoke (Lam. iii. 27), bowing down under the Omnipotent hand, (1 Pet. v. 6), and prostrating itself beneath the infinite and eternal will, (Gen. xviii. 25.) It is *resignation*, giving the whole matter into the best hands, that He may undertake, (Isa. xxxviii. 14), and undoubtingly referring every future event unto the God of the lilies and the birds. Matt. vi. 26. It is *humility*, owning itself little, and dependent, and mean, and unworthy, and therefore willing to suffer. And it is *penitence*, bewailing sin, pleading for mercy, wondering that it suffers so

little, and remembering how light are these pains compared with the agonies of the lost, or the vicarious sorrows of the Lord our righteousness. All this, and much more, is present in every case of truly sanctified Christian affliction; and this sheds a light through the curtains of evangelical sorrow, which is altogether unknown to the most resolute of stoical heroes.

There is a third consideration, not to be omitted in our study of Christian patience. The word, as said above, implies *suffering* and *endurance*, but it includes another idea. It has reference to *time*. It is not barely willingness to *suffer*, but willingness to suffer *more*. Nature would not wait a moment; it would be delivered *now*. Grace leaves all to God, and says, "My times are in his hand!" Though the succour tarry, patience can wait. Hab. ii. 3. What

grace is this, thus added to faith and love? Is it not HOPE, the sister grace, that abideth? 1 Cor. xiii. 13. Leaning on her anchor, hope looks out from her post of observation, casting the eye over a waste of billows, and sweeping that dim horizon where as yet no sail twinkles along the distant line that unites the sea and sky, but sure that though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning. Psa. xxx. 5. He that hath been with her in six troubles, in the seventh will not forsake her. Job v. 19. Here is a blessed pillow for the languid aching head, a cool refreshment for the throbbing temple. Here is a secret cordial which has enabled many a child of sorrow to bear the heavy load; when tribulation worketh *patience*. Rom. v. 3. This hope is more than empty conjecture or vague expectation. It is firm;

it is fixed. Its hold is above. It seizes on words of promise and of covenant. It is sustaining itself by the arm of the mighty Saviour. Its spiritual cable grapples that which is within the veil (Heb. vi. 19), and hence it maketh not ashamed. Rom. v. 5.

If it were God's way to send on his children only such trials as are pungent, quick, and brief, however severe, the test of patience would be incomplete; but sometimes his rod lies long, and the soul is made to cry out, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore!" Psa. xxxviii. 2. "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?" Psa. xiii. 1. The very working of the remedy depends on this withholding of immediate cure. Yet the believing child learns to think and feel that God's time is best, and is assured that "He doth not afflict will-

ingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lam. iii. 33. And hope opens the window, and even though no dry land as yet appears, welcomes the olive-branch borne by the dove of promise. Gen. viii. 10, 11. Deep may call unto deep. Psa. xlii. 7. "Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." (verse 8.) "My soul, wait thou only upon God!" Psa. lxii. 5. Thus she cheers the night-watches, and in the multitude of her thoughts within her, God's comforts delight her soul. Psa. xciv. 19. The experience of the psalmist is made for such times of languishing. Many a solitary one has renewed the strain of David's pensive chord, and sung with plaintive note, "I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourn-

eth by reason of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee." Psa. lxxxviii. 8, 9. The night wears heavily away; the stars in their courses shine dimly; no streak of eastern dawning betokens day. Yet the hopeful sufferer can say, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope; my soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Psa. cxxx. 5, 6. And patience, not worn out with waiting, turns on its pillow, and breathes itself to God, saying, "My soul is even as a weaned child." Psa. cxxxi. 2.

It would not be difficult to fill up the whole tract with an account of those different circumstances of a human creature in which he must exercise

this Christian virtue. But those to whom such details would be applicable are the very persons who need no prompter; they know what their distresses are. It is much more important to observe, that there is no kind or degree of suffering which our Heavenly Father ordains, under which we may not exercise patience, and, therefore, as every human being is born to suffer, there is not a single reader to whom this lesson is not important, however much he may think the contrary, in the pride and self-sufficiency of youth, or health, or fortune, or good spirits. And though certain persons in our fastidious generation grow intensely weary, when time is bestowed in sustaining and comforting the broken-hearted—let such know, that *their* time is coming, and that even if now they have their “good things,” and think their “mountain

stands strong," they shall yet live to behold the day in which they must have a stock and habit, yea a *grace* of patience, or sink into extreme despondency, if not despair.

In one view the suffering life of many Christians, and those the best, is hard to understand, for it seems at war not only with God's fatherly goodness, but with his gracious covenant. (Read Jer. xii. 12, and Psa. lxxiii.) But we must never lose our hold of two cardinal pillars, the very Jachin and Boaz of our temple: (1) that happiness in this world is not the chief good; the affirming of which is the radical error of all the common public economy, and much of the philanthropy of the day; and (2) that the education, or discipline, or training, or perfecting of a soul is so great and divine a work, that it is worth a lifetime of distress; so that no

redeemed saint will look back on the longest sufferings of the present life as more than the scarcely perceptible moment before an eternity of holy delight. Angels look down and see poor sin-wounded creatures fighting against their chief medicine. As has been said, God does not afflict nor grieve the children of men "willingly," arbitrarily, out of any love to see them suffer, or any indifference to their sorrows; but with a wise and definite end, which will be revealed hereafter. The entire process of Christian endurance, pain-bearing, or patience, from beginning to end, in all its connection of parts, is more deeply interesting to one who could read it, than any drama ever enacted on the stage. So it will one day appear, when not only the particular sufferer, but all the company of God's elect in heaven, shall look back

and see many a mystery of providence resolved. They will rise to higher admiration of the divine plan, when they shall be instructed why Joseph had his youth oppressed by cruelty, exile and imprisonment; why David was a persecuted fugitive, and a bereaved father; why the apostles were as sheep appointed to the slaughter; why the early Christians were mowed down by the sword; and why to this day they that will live godly suffer persecution. They will recall ten thousand cases, (for eternity has neither limits nor weariness,) in which some of the best of men have lain under pangs, or in languishing from sore diseases; or journeyed through a valley of gloom and depression; or been marks for arrows from the bow of wicked fellow-creatures, and more malignant demons; and why others, with hearts sickened by hope

deferred, waited years and almost lifetimes without seeing the accomplishment of their strongest desires. When these several circles are complete, and every covering removed, and God's light thrown on dark places of the spiritual temple, it will appear, that this very divine product, to wit, *holy patience*, has been as dear to the great Architect of the Church, as is the costliest sculpture to the most devoted enthusiast in art. And therefore we are exhorted not merely to have patience, but to let patience have her *perfect work*.

II. The *perfect work* of patience is plainly nothing less than the full and thorough carrying out of patience, with unfaltering strength of soul, in every kind and measure of trial, unto the very end. Death closes all trials of the believer; but until death he is to have

his armour on. There may be some reality of true Christian patience, and yet it may be very weak. We must learn to bear up bravely, and with the putting forth of a complete manful energy. Small encounters are useful to the raw recruit; they exercise him in the virtues which in process of time make him a soldier. He that bearded the lion and bear, afterwards accepted the challenge of Goliath, though still a ruddy youth. Could we look on daily troubles, as exercises set us by the Master, to fit us for the higher efforts of patience, we should be saved much repining and many groans. The great duty is always the duty of the day, of the hour, of this moment. If our equanimity is destroyed by the trifles of a life generally prosperous—what can we expect of ourselves, in the water-floods of tribulation which may

yet roll in? Jer. xii. 5. Let us learn to bear with a hard hand on the helm, before the tempest arises. Under the sense of God's supreme governance and paternal love, and in expectation of reward and rest hereafter, let us bow ourselves to the sovereign disposal; bearing all that God sends, and Christ our Mediator concurs in, with a yielding, filial, believing soul.

Patience may be said to have its perfect work, when it withstands a great, sudden and extraordinary affliction without being shaken. Uncommon faith is necessary for such an exercise as this. Indeed who has not cause to join in the prayer, *Lead us not into temptation!* Strong Christians are the persons to whom this forefront of the battle is reserved; to them "it is *given* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his

sake." Phil. i. 29. It is *Job*, the "perfect man," who is carried through the unexampled conflict. And the early believers to whom James addressed the words of the text, were exposed to evils such as happily we know nothing of. Yet they needed the exhortation.

Patience has its perfect work, when it does not give way but holds out, however long may be the trial. Even weakness may sustain a momentary attack, and pungent anguish may be borne, if it be soon over. But to have day after day of pain, and night after night of fearful watching; to lie down heavy, yet hoping for no alleviation in the morning; to be wounded again and again, and find increasing years bring new losses and deeper sorrows;—this has been the lot of some who were God's children, and concerning whom it might well be said, that though the

outer man perished, the inner man was renewed day by day. No man can number the cases of hopeless disease, tending incurably to certain and painful death, which occur in every age, and that among true believers. Christ's confessors have, in more periods of the church than one, spent large parts of their best years in prison. Millions have borne all the complicated ills of poverty all their days. And those who have survived to old age, have found it often one long disease. All these have had "need of patience," and would not have experienced its perfect work, if they had fainted in the day of adversity. I can never forget a Christian woman, eminent for spiritual joys, who was confined to her bed, with a wasting and at times excruciating disease, for about twenty years. Let not frivolous or superficial professors flatter them-

selves that those fair-weather graces which they boast of now, will stand them in stead when long storms begin to howl. Unusual supports from the very hand of the Spirit are necessary, against such conjunctures; and which of us can be certain that such shall not befall himself?

Patience has a *perfect work*; when it grows to be an *abiding habit of the soul*. This cannot be, except by repeated acts of faith, submission and hope, reiterated till they are like a second nature. Such endurance rests on settled principle, and is an eminent work of the Holy Spirit. There are few more noble characters we can give of any, than when we say of a believer, *He is habitually patient*. The character is rare, but we are invited to attain it.

Whether the words of the apostle be considered as a command or an entreaty,

they equally imply that there was some effort to be put forth. Let patience have her perfect work. "Place yourselves in the posture of being thoroughly and imperturbably constant even to the close of your mortal struggle." This enjoins the forbearance of whatever is contrary to the meek and patient spirit, and the acquisition, preservation and increase of every good gift which is favourable to it; for instance, humility, sense of sin, godly sorrow and shame, thirst for holiness, faith, hope, courage, love and joy. Indeed patience has its perfect work, only where all sister graces are carried forward with symmetrical increase; and whenever one of these is nourished into new strength, it contributes so much to the solid habit of Christian patience.

III. Let us consider some of the *motives* to let patience have her perfect work.

1. *This is a virtue which is needed every day.* Some excellencies of the soul are called out only by great emergencies, but the world in which we live is so beset with vexations that there is not a day, there is scarcely an hour, in which we are not called to be patient. The little events of domestic life, connected with ordinary labour and service, give the cumbered and troubled Martha as keen anguish as is felt by the general of an army or the ruler of a state, from defeats and revolutions. The inward grace required must not be measured by the apparent magnitude of the burden, but the strength of the sustainer. Spirits above perhaps look down on princes contending about the crown of an empire, with as much contempt as we bestow on infants fighting for a straw. But trials are not all equal. Sometimes, as we have seen,

vehement surges of affliction break in; and we know not on what day this may occur; hence we must be ready every day. All the days of our life we are going over one and the same course of Christian duty, viz., submitting our own selfish will to the will of God.

2. *Increase of patience is increase of happiness.* Though present happiness is not the great object of life, it is one of the effects of religion, to which we cannot be indifferent. And what is very remarkable, there is not a single religious act, which does not increase our happiness. Properly understood, the whole moral law, whether at Sinai or the mount of the Beatitudes, utters this one commandment, BE HAPPY! What is thus true of holiness in general is eminently true of this mode of it in particular. Pain almost ceases to be pain, to a mind that fully yields itself

to God. That this is true in a much higher sense than ordinary Christians suppose, is apparent in the case of the martyrs; (Heb. xi. 32—49,) and we have known instances in common life where the most horrible maladies, almost unmanning mere spectators, have been borne with equanimity and even cheerfulness, by disciples of Christ. Patience disarms affliction. If the patience were perfect, the suffering would be annihilated, as to its effect on happiness. The reason why true Christians sometimes endure great distresses before entire relief comes, is not that patience is an insufficient antidote, but that they have not patience enough. And here observe a striking difference between the stoical hardness of a worldly mind, and the sacred endowment which we are endeavouring to recommend. A stout hearted unbeliever will now and then

appear absolutely unshrinking under trials, such as bodily pains, calumny, loss of children, hatred and enmity of fellow-creatures; but his shield is *insensibility*. He has made the surface callous. And in so doing he has stopped up the avenues as well of pleasure as of pain. He has diminished his sorrows without increasing his joys. Now observe how opposite the case of Christ's disciple. He suffers too, and triumphs in suffering, but not by insensibility. He feels the wound. The thrill of a poignant infliction runs through his quick and sentient nerve to the centre of feeling, as nimbly as in the most inconsolable and maddened unbeliever. He is not stupefied; he is not seared; his temperament of genuine humanity is all alive to grief; but it is also alive to joy. And that joy God pours in, so that he glories in tribulation also. *Re-*

ligion, which has made his susceptibilities more tender, opens new access for refined pleasures. For loss, he finds indemnity; and for pain and woe, a spiritual faith and hope, love and joy, which overcome and absorb them. Patience in such an advanced experience is no longer unfeeling acquiescence, but a swallowing up of man's will in the will of God. What abundant reason have we, in this valley of tears and tombs, to strive that patience may have her perfect work!

3. *Obedience to the requisition of the text conduces to true greatness of character.* Religion, properly understood, is nothing else than a restitution begun, of humanity to its perfect condition.

To be without religion is to be curtailed of the dimensions of man's character. Every state of mind and heart which religion commands is just

so far a return to spiritual health. No human soul can be truly great while ignorant of God, alienated from God, opposed to God, slavishly in dread of God, and out of communion with God. Each grace of the Holy Spirit tends to lift man up towards the ideal of humanity. The trials of life bring all men into a certain conflict with adverse circumstances, producing pain. In this conflict many are conquered. But the Christian combatant finds every trial an occasion for bringing out latent reserves of a strength derived from Christ his Head. When he suffers therefore sharply and long, he is only like a soldier going from one battle to another, and waxing hardier and more courageous after each success. Hear how Paul, long tried in this athletic effort, expresses this Christian magnanimity, (1 Cor. ix. 25,) "I therefore

run, not as uncertainly ; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." And "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." There is reason to believe, that no great Christian character can be developed without some severe discipline, that is, without patience, in its large and scriptural sense.

4. *Confirmed patience tends to usefulness in the Church.* The very reverse is often thought by the sufferer himself, especially if his trial throws him into solitude, poverty, contempt of brethren, weakness of body, pains of old age, or separation from friends. In the chamber of melancholy seclusion how many a soul has mourned that all opportunity of doing any thing for Christ was cut off. But this is a shortsighted and defective conclusion. When God's infinitely wise and holy will is done, then the great end of our creation,

and our redemption, and our sanctification is accomplished, so far as we are concerned; whether it be by doing or by suffering. If it were possible for a perfectly sinless angel to be perpetually bathed in sorrow by the will of God, the pure spirit would accept the coming trial with a yielding bliss. And when the perfectly sinless Jesus, who was "very man," sank in griefs which surpass comprehension, he was accomplishing the purposes of the Godhead, and said, "Not my will, but thine be done." Now by sending trials and educing the grace of patience in repeated acts, God fits the soul for labours incalculably beyond every thing it could have effected without this education. And these very pains, and the conduct of a believer under them, becoming visible to bystanders and fellow-servants, as well as to the ungodly themselves, go up as

a costly odour, to magnify the grace of the gospel. So that no sermons ever preached so loudly as the transient view of a suffering saint has sometimes done, when in the fiery heart of the hot furnace, he has been seen unhurt, with one like unto the Son of God. (Dan. iii. 25.) In both ways, therefore, by preparing for action, and by exhibiting the glory of grace, patience tends to benefit the Church.

5. Finally. *Patience when duly sustained leads to a great reward.* Not in the sense of the Papists, who strike a commercial balance between pains and recompense, and set off so much trouble in this life against so much merited blessing in the life to come. But in perfect consistency with our belief that after all is done we are unprofitable servants, that all heavenly good is merited by our Saviour, and not by us,

and that a man may suffer pain here which shall be swallowed up in greater pains hereafter, we maintain and teach, that in the case of true believers, the gracious deportment of the soul under earthly affliction carries it forward to higher happiness than it would otherwise have reached. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." By the work of God's Spirit, the soul that suffers receives greater capacity for eventual joy. Whoso bears God's burdens in a godly manner is made holier, and more fit and able to take in the surpassing blessedness of rest. And then our heavenly Father, who seeth not as man seeth, does not measure our obedience on a physical scale, by the amount and number of sensible acts, as if he reckoned up so many deeds outwardly done, so

many palpable effects produced, so many words spoken ; but by the quality of the inward affection and will, which may be heavenward and holy, and infinitely pleasing to God, in a poor creature locked in a dungeon, or motionless on a bed of illness. Where the soul *pleases God*, there the great work of life is accomplished ; in an apostolic discourse or miracle, in a gift of charity, in a resistance of temptation, or in agony on a cross.

Patience, heavenly patience, under what God inflicts, is more pleasing to him than thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil ; which is of itself the all-comprehensive motive to pious submission and endurance. But what is pleasing to God, as the fruit of his Holy Spirit, God will graciously reward. "I know thy works," saith he to Ephesus, "and thy labour and

thy patience." "I know thy works," saith he to Thyatira, "and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience." "Because," saith he to Philadelphia, "thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee." "Behold," saith he to Smyrna, "the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!" May I not add with renewed emphasis the exhortation of our apostle, though it struck strangely on the ear at first, "My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience." O my brother—my sister—more patience will make us more like Christ. What are our sufferings to his! Meditate, step by step, on the degrees of his humilia-

tion, accompanying Him whom your souls love, from point to point of his unexampled sorrows; and thus will you find sin grow more intolerable, and suffering more light.

THE END.