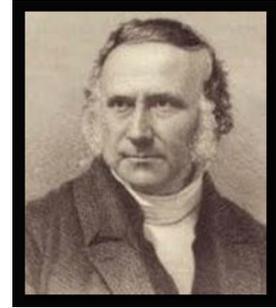


# *God Reigns; Or Despair*



I do not deem it a departure from the purpose or the title page of this publication, when I insert the following sketch of experience, which I copy from a paper which lies before me. The author of it, a clergyman, is still living, and still exercises the functions of his Pastoral office. He here writes a little sketch of his own sad experience, which I am permitted to copy from his own hand-writing, though it was not designed for publication, being in a letter to a friend. As he has here explained how it was, that he rose out of the dark and turbid waters of despair, the explanation may be of some service to others,—as I know it has been to his friend. Despair is opposed to faith, and every sinner on earth has the right to oppose faith to despair.

The following is a part of the letter:

“My DEAR FRIEND,

“You say I am always happy, but you know little about me. I am not accustomed to obtrude my griefs upon others, for awakening a painful and useless sympathy; and I have sadly learnt, that there may be griefs utterly beyond the power of others to understand, and which, therefore, their sympathies cannot reach. But I have seasons (and they are not unfrequent), when my soul is cast down within me. I am sure I can sympathize with any and every trouble of your darkest hours. \* \* \*

It is not a year since I found myself involved in all the horrors of darkness. I had hoped that such a season would never again return upon me; but it did. I had formerly learnt, that ill health, or rather nervousness in any state of health, has a great influence in bringing on depressed

feelings; and at the period to which I now allude, I was fully conscious of my nervous condition, and I recollected and reflected upon its influence. But this did not help me out of my trouble. Day by day the darkness settled down upon my soul, deeper and deeper. I could see no light! I was no Christian! The Bible was a sealed book to me; Christ was as a fiction, and salvation as a dream. Prayer was not so much of a mockery, as a lie, for I felt that I did not believe what my lips uttered, when they said they called upon God. I did not believe in God. I was a dark sceptic. I could realize nothing, but my own wretchedness; and in the depth of that wretchedness I cursed the day in which I was born! Many and many a time I wished I never had been born, or had died when I first saw the light. Many and many a time I wished myself a dog, a horse, a stone, anything but myself. I could realize nothing, rest on nothing, believe nothing.

“No pen can describe the horrors I endured. They were of every sort. I can only give you a few hints of them.

“ Blasphemous thoughts, not lawful to utter even here; temptations which I may not name,—things that would freeze your blood,—yea, things which made me feel that hell itself could be no worse,—would be darted through the mind, without volition or control! My poor soul was their sport. She had no power over them, not an item. She was tossed about, like a leaf in the storm, helpless, hopeless. At times, things would flash over my mind, like the flashes of the pit, as I thought; for I could not account for them in any other way. It was as if Satan spoke to me, to jeer at me, and taunt me, and triumph over me in his malignity:—‘where is your God now? what do you think of prayer now?’ These ideas would come with such suddenness and vividness, so involuntary, so surprising to myself, that I could not believe them the production of my own mind; it must be that Satan was permitted to buffet me, and expend all his malice upon me, giving me a foretaste of hell.

“In my agony I used to roll upon the floor of my study, hour after hour, in despair, thinking it a sin, a shame, an impossibility for me to make another sermon. I knew I was not fit to preach. I thought I should

be only acting a part, only playing the hypocrite knowingly. I would have relinquished the ministry if I could. But what could I do? I must preach. And after I had put it off as long as I could, and had scarcely time enough left to prepare for the Sabbath, I used to get my texts, and enter upon the composition of my sermons, feeling that I was the most miserable and most unworthy being on this side of the pit, and that I should soon be in it. When I got engaged over my sermons, I used to forget myself; and then, as my thoughts were occupied with the truth of God, I would become interested in the study, and get along pretty well till Sunday was over. I would preach like an apostle, and go home in despair! I tried every device, but no relief came.

“I went to a distinguished clergyman, and told him my case. He was kind to me. He said some wise things to me. But he began to say to me, that God was disciplining me, to prepare me for some greater usefulness: ‘Stop! sir,’ said I. ‘I cannot receive that!—I can’t! I can’t! It does not belong to me. I thought of that, but my conscience rejected it as a snare of the devil, to keep me at peace in my sins. I told him I knew better; I was afraid, and had good reason to be afraid, that I never had any religion;—I could not live so, and certainly I could not die so. I told him that I could comfort others, and lift them out of such troubles as seemed to resemble mine,—had done it,—was skilled in doing it,—if nothing else, I could beguile them out of their despair, without their knowing how I did it; but I could not comfort myself; my case was different, and I could not receive the same truths I preached to them. The ideas and promises which cheered them could not cheer me. I told him I had often thought myself like the man of gloom, who applied in his despair to some friend, perhaps minister, and his friend said to him, ‘divert your thoughts,—take exercise, amusement,—go to hear Carlini play,’ (a famous harlequin, attracting crowds at the time.) ‘Alas! sir,’ said he, in despair, ‘I am Carlini myself!’ And so was I. I went home in despair, weeping along the street as I went.

“While I was in just this state, perplexed, agitated, tormented night and day, fearing and half expecting I should become a maniac, I had occasion to take a woman to the mad-house. (She would go with me,—her

friends could not manage her.) As I rode along with her in the carriage, and conversed with her, I felt in my soul that I was more fit for the madhouse than she! I left her there. As I came out, I looked around upon the grounds, the trees, the sky, and knew nothing, and doubted everything, and thought of myself, my torment of soul became intolerable! It was with difficulty that I could restrain myself from screaming out in my agony! I got into the carriage to go home. The young man who was with me made some attempts at conversation, but I could not attend to him; and finding my answers incoherent, I suppose, or finding me mute, he looked at me with astonishment, and afterwards left me to myself.

“We rode on. I could realize nothing—believe nothing. I did not believe there was a God! I felt that I was sinking down into the madness of despair! a forlorn, hopeless, eternal wreck! a wretch too wicked to live, and not fit to die!

“By-and-bye my mind began to question and reason. I am—that is certain. These are trees—that is a river—yonder is the sun. All these things are certain. But where did they come from? They did not make themselves. I did not make myself: There is dependence here. They do not govern themselves. There is order here. The sun keeps his place, and is now hiding himself in his west in due time. ‘There is a God! Yes, there is a God!’ That was the first gleam of light. I held on to that idea; ‘there is a God, there is a God, there is a God!’ I kept affirming it in my mind. I felt I had got hold of one certainty, and I would not let it go. I could believe one thing.

“In a moment, (for these ideas flashed through my mind like flashes of lightning,) I got hold of another idea, another certainty, and then linked the two certainties together. It was order, dominion. God has dominion. Yes, He rules. ‘God reigns!’ said I. It was an ocean of light to me! It flooded the universe! ‘God reigns! God reigns! God reigns!’ I kept repeating these two words mentally, ‘God reigns! God reigns!’ It was triumph to me. It was glory. I almost leaped from the carriage. I groaned aloud under the burden of my joy. (The young man started up and gazed at me. I did not notice him.) I held on to the idea. ‘God reigns!’ said I. I

dared not let it go; 'God reigns!' I dared not let any other idea enter my mind; 'God reigns! God reigns! God reigns!' said my exulting soul.

"Then came a contest within me,—a conflict like the clash between thousands of opposing sabres! I felt the full power of my idea, if I could but hold it; but the assaults that were made upon it came like the shock of battle! One thought after another seemed to heave over my soul, like the waves, to dash me from my rock! You are a lost sinner; vile—a wretch! 'God reigns!' said my soul. You are a hypocrite! 'God reigns!' said my soul. You are a fool! 'God reigns!' You are a madman! 'God reigns!' You are mad, for no sane mind ever acted in this way! 'God reigns!' I am certain of that—'God reigns!' Wo to you if lie does! 'God reigns!' What do you know about God? 'God reigns!' You are a sceptic, an infidel! 'God reigns!' God has abandoned you! 'God reigns!' You are moved this moment by the power of the Devil! 'God reigns!' said my exulting soul.

"Thus one temptation after another dashed upon me, and all I could do was to hold on to my rock. 'God reigns!' At one moment I trembled, as an onset was made upon me; the next moment I triumphed, as the onset was hurled back by the power of the one certainty I wielded. I was sinking, amid the dark surges that dashed over me. In an instant I was above them all—governed them all—and could have governed a thousand such oceans. because 'God reigns!' I opposed that shield to every wave of midnight—to every shock of scepticism—to every 'fiery dart,' that Satan hurled at me. I held it up, and defied despair and the Devil. I turned it in every direction, upon every foe, every fear, every doubt; 'God Reigns!' and I wished to know nothing else.

"I came home holding these two words over my poor soul, now settled, soothed down to perfect peace—calm, happy. I did not want to think anything, know anything, care for anything: 'God reigns!' and that is enough.

"Gradually I got hold of other truths, and employed them, I hope, in faith; but for many days I needed nothing to fill my soul with delight, but that glorious idea, 'God reigns!' 'God reigns!' It saved me from being a maniac.

“This is but a very imperfect glance at one of my dark seasons. It can give you only a partial idea of them. No pen can ever describe them, and no imagination conceive of their horrors, unless the positive experiences of despair have been such as to make imagination ashamed of its feebleness.

“I do not wish the return of such seasons. They may, indeed, have been of some use to me, as my wiser friend suggested; but I do not like such discipline; I do not wish to learn the power of faith, by being scorched by the blaze of hell.

“Never can I even recollect those dark trials, without being overcome with emotion. I wish I could forget them. But they are burnt upon my memory, and I have not been able to write this without many tears. God grant you may not be able to understand me now, or at any time here-after. But if you ever should come into such depths, I know of but one way to get out:—faith, faith, faith. You must not try to get out. You must let God take you out. You can do nothing for yourself. You might as well breast the dash of the ocean, or brave the thunder of heaven. You must let God ‘hide you in the cleft of the rock, and cover you with His hand!’ You must just exercise a passive faith,—much more difficult than an active one. At least I have found no other way. Reason with such feelings?—reason with a whirlwind as soon,—with a tempest,—with the maddened ocean! You cannot reason with them. They will take you up, and dash you about like the veriest mite in the universe. Look;—do nothing but look. God reigns. Jesus Christ is King. Leave all to Him;—it is Faith.”

It was a bright doctrine, to which this minister clung in the time of his trouble. It is a great truth, “God reigns,” and, therefore, ‘grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord;’ and, therefore, no sinner on earth need ever despair.