**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**27. THE BENEDICTION OF THE SNOW by JOHN H. JOWETT**

THE student of the Word of God, and, indeed, the student of human life, is greatly impressed with the amazing variety of the Divine processes in the culture of the soul. "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud... ." These two ministries, so strangely contrasted--the rain and the snow--are equally the friends of the bountiful harvest. That rain should be linked with the harvest I can quite well understand; but one is startled with the range of the vision which connects the snow with the ripened seed. It is reasonable that the delicate dew should be related to the delicate bud, but it is a larger outlook that connects the frosty night with the opening leaf. It is a congenial thought which links the wooing zephyr with the yellowing grain. But here the kinship is made with the cutting blast. Here we are shown the relation of ice to the waving corn! It is this breadth of the process, comprehending such startling contraries, that makes one see the variety of the discipline in the Divine culture of the individual and the race.

The rain provides a most beautiful figure of the softening ministries of grace. It is a fitting expression of the tender mercies of our God. The rain is typical of all the gentle, genial providences, the April weather of mingled sunshine and shower. We have all known these seasons, for we have all experienced them, the seasons when God's love has played upon us like rain upon the hard ground, and when "the barren ground has become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water." No Christian disciple has walked along with the Master, and especially in times of sore affliction, without the knowledge of that gentle consolation when God "comes down like rain upon the mown grass."

But the snow, too, is in the process of Divine culture. There is a place for the frost, the chill, and the winter. The snow is an apparent foe to the purposed bud and seed. It is repressive rather than expressive. It seems to be the minister of death rather than of life, hastening decay rather than promoting growth. And yet the snow is the servant of the harvest. It "cometh down from heaven," it "maketh the earth to bring forth and bud." And thus it is that the cold, cutting discipline in life, for which the snow provides the symbol, is also a servant of the spiritual harvest, and generates and nourishes the flowers and fruits of the perfected life.

Sometimes we can see quite clearly how the harvest of the soul has been helped by the frost and the snow. Winter possesses a life. The grey days come and the cold, dark nights. And then some grace appears, some fine reverence, some chaste reserve, some beautiful modesty, some violet of the spirit, like crocus or gentian revealing itself under the melting coverlet of Alpine snows. It was not there before the snow had fallen, but now it lifts its lowly head before the face of an approving heaven. Let me quote one or two examples of spiritual graces and purposes which have been gendered and nourished beneath the snow robe. Here is one: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Thy word." Something was born in the severities of affliction; the virtue of fidelity was nourished in the wintry day. And here is another: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." Here is a faculty that is strengthened by the frost. Affliction adds to the man's worth. The grace of refined perception was found in the day of the falling snow. There is a third suggestive example in the life of Hezekiah: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death." The gloom of affliction settled upon his soul; the snow was falling! Now, if we turn to the day when the winter is over, we shall find "flowers appear on the earth." Listen to this word when Hezekiah was recovered of his sickness: "I shall go softly all my years." The snow brought the flowers of delicacy and gentleness and considerateness, and never again would he break the bruised reed.

And here is the Apostle Paul, full of love, full of ardour, burning with passionate quest in the service of his Lord. He was an Apostle of the Kingdom, and through his ministry the evangel of grace was being carried from city to city, from land to land, from clime to clime. He was a glorious sower of the heavenly seed, and there was promise of rich and bountiful harvest. And then the snow began to fall. Cruel, biting blasts blew about his ministry. The evangel appeared to be icebound, and the evangelist himself was held in servitude in Rome. Now turn to the record, to the words written while the snow was yet falling: "The things that happened unto me have turned out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel." Again we have a harvest helped by the wintry day. Expansion is gained from the agent of apparent restriction. The frost is the nurse of multiplying growth.

Let me give one other example taken from the more general fields of literature. I find it in that great passage in Shakespeare where Cardinal Wolsey is passing out of the glory and pomp of carnal grandeur into the cold wintry gloom of isolation and neglect.

Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness!

This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth

The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,

And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;

The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,

And--when he thinks, good easy man, full surely

His greatness is a-ripening--nips his root,

And then he falls, as I do.

The frost has come, the snow is falling! But is that the end, a blighted, stricken, withered life? Let us read again: "I feel my heart new open'd." The frost is the minister of the opening, the snow is the servant of a quickened life. Let me read once more:

Cromwell: How does your grace?

Wolsey: Why, well;

Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.

I know myself now; and I feel within me

A peace above all earthly dignities,

A still and quiet conscience.

And so I say the snow is the minister in the development of the Lord's design. If we had no snow in our lives there would be no chivalry, no springs of tenderness, no brimming rivers of noble compassion. If there were no snow I am afraid there might be no violets, and life would not attain those holy graces which shone in the life of the Son of God. "He learned obedience by the things that he suffered." If the soul had no winter it might miss its intimate vision of God.