

# THE BLESSIDNESS OF OLD AGE

By George Henderson



LONGINGS FOR HOME

.. My soul amid this stormy world is like some fluttering dove,  
And fain would be as swift of wing to fly to Him above ;  
The cords that bound my heart to earth were broken by His  
hand,  
Before His throne I found myself a stranger in the land.

That visage marred, those sorrows deep, the vinegar, the gall—  
These were the golden chains of love His captive to entral.  
My heart is with Him on the throne, and ill can brook delay,  
Each moment listening for the Voice : ' Rise up, and come  
away ! '

With hope deferred, oft sick and faint : ' Why tarties He ? ' I  
cry ;  
And should He gently chide my haste, thus would my heart  
reply :  
' May not an exile, Lord, desire his own sweet land to see ?  
May not a captive seek release—a prisoner, to be free ? '

A child, when far away, may long for home and kindred dear ;  
And she that waits her absent lord may sigh till he appear.  
I would my Lord and Saviour know, that which no measure  
knows—  
Would search the mystery of Thy love, the depth of all Thy  
woes.

I fain would strike my golden harp before the Father's throne,  
There cast my crown of righteousness, and sing what grace has  
done !  
Ah, leave me not in this dark world a stranger still to roam :  
Come, Lord, and take me to Thyself ! Come, Jesus—quickly  
come ! "

This pamphlet is cheerfully printed and sent forth by  
Grace Baptist Church. We pray that it will be a  
blessing to many of God's saints.

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certainly of the Saviour's second advent, and the signs of the times, its imminence, there is nothing so uncertain as the hour of its fulfilment. "Of that hour knoweth no man"; and hence it is possible that we may have to pass through the valley of the shadow which, equally with our being caught up to meet Him in the air, will prove to be an avenue to God. And since all the things which we know about our Saviour make us trust Him in the things which we do not know, we should face the possibility of death peacefully and with an untroubled heart.

"Yes, there are greener pastures, stiller streams,  
And music, battling all earth's mortal dreams;  
Lead on, then, Shepherd-Lord—new glory waits,  
Ambushed in shadow by yon sunset gates."

In the course of a sermon at Cambridge the late Bishop of Durham said that during the first world war a variety of entertainment was arranged for some of the men going to the Front. At the close, the Colonel asked a young officer to voice the soldiers' thanks. He did so with perfect courtesy and pleasantness. Then, changing his tone, he said: "We are soon crossing to France and the trenches, and very possibly, of course, to death. Will any of our friends here tell us how to die?" A great silence followed. Then one of the vocalists quietly found her way to the front of the stage and sang that lovely solo, "O rest in the Lord." "There were very few dry eyes when she had finished," said the one who first narrated the story. If we examine the New Testament Scriptures carefully we will find that Paul was certain of three things: "that he had an almighty Saviour; that his life was in the hands of a loving Father; and that a place in the Father's house awaited him after death; the three things that most utterly perplex and trouble men—sin, sorrow, death." Beloved aged Christian friends, these priceless possessions are also yours; and although the tempests may howl, and the enemy rage, you can, like a tired child, rest in the everlasting arms.

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF OLD AGE

"Youth is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret"—so wrote one who reached the highest pinnacle of earthly fame. It is a pathetic utterance; and, if it represents his own experience, clearly indicates that he failed to solve the discords or to find the final harmony. In contrast with it we have the statement of one of the greatest of our poets who evidently found life a glad some thing and who, as the sun was westering, could say:

"Grow old along with me—the best is yet to be—  
The last of life, for which the first was made;

Our times are in His hand Who saith: 'A whole I planned;  
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid!'"

We would like in this chapter to say a few words which we hope will be helpful to some of the Lord's aged ones; to the dear grandmothers and grandfathers who have grown old in the service of their Master, and who are now nearing life's close. We think of them with reverence and love, and would fain dispel any anxieties which they may have by reminding them that it is better on before, and that their joy and usefulness may deepen, and extend in ever-widening degree, right to the end.

"For age is opportunity no less  
Than youth itself, though in another dress;  
And as the evening twilight fades away,  
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day."

We shall first think of old age itself; and then of the things which usually accompany it.

### INEVITABLE

First, it is

It is necessary to utter this truism about old age, because many think of its approach only with regret and misgiving. But just as in Nature we have spring, summer, autumn, winter, and everything belonging to these seasons is beautiful in its time, so, in the story of man

But old age is not only inevitable ; it is also

#### BEAUTIFUL

" We all do fade as a leaf ; but the leaf is never so beautiful as when it is faded. No artist ever painted a picture so beautiful as the panorama of woodlands transfigured with the indescribable mingling of gold, crimson, and saffron, as if a flood of divine glory swept across them."

What is more beautiful than the declining days of a Christian ? His character is never so attractive as then. The light may fade and the shadows deepen, but there is increasing mellowness, sweetness, and serenity of spirit.

" In the fading leaf we have the pledge and promise of a coming spring ; and in the autumn touch and dis-mantling process of human life there lies the promise of an immortality beyond, which knows no sorrow and no decay. The coming glory is over all. Its light and peace even here and now pervade the restful spirit, the prelude and the foretaste of that brighter day whose sun will know no setting."

But age is not only inevitable and beautiful ; it is also

#### BLESSED

Better than anything we can say about it is the testimony of one who experienced this blessedness. Listen to the words of this aged soul-winner : " My mouth is full of laughter and my heart is full of joy. I feel so sorry for folks who don't like to grow old, and who are trying all the time to hide the fact that they are growing old." If God should say to me : " I will let you begin over again, and you may have your youth back once more," I should say : " O dear Lord, if Thou dost not mind, I prefer to go on growing old."

I would not exchange the peace of mind, the abiding rest of soul, the measure of wisdom I have gained from the sweet and bitter and perplexing experiences of life ;

of dying saints during forty years, I cannot improve. I said to him : ' Father Junkins, do you think that God will forget any of His promises ? ' I shall always remember the sweet smile that came over the face of the old saint as he looked up at me. ' Praise God,' he said, ' that is wonderful ! He will remember them, won't He ? ' I began to repeat promises, but in a few minutes he said : ' I'm tired. I'll just fall asleep and trust Him to remember His precious promises to me.' In a few hours he had gone home to be with the Promiser."

Now let us pass to

#### ITS COMPENSATIONS

for they are great and manifold. Briefly, let us be reminded that we are assured of

#### (1) Divine companionship

" Even to your old age I am He ; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you ; I have made and I will bear ; even I will carry, and will deliver you " (Isaiah 46. 4). " He that is perfect in knowledge is with thee " (Job 36. 4).

" Even down to old age all My people shall prove

My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love ;

And then when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne."

Not only so ; we are distinctly told that our old age may be graced with

#### (2) Heavenly fruitfulness

" They shall still bring forth fruit in old age ; they shall be fat and flourishing " (Psalm 92. 14). Grandma can give to the girls the benefit of her long experience of life, and counsel them as to the paths in which they should walk ; grandfather can point out to the boys the rocks on which so many have been shipwrecked, and save them from similar doom. And, best of all, the fruit of the Spirit—that lovely nine-fold cluster described in Galatians

there are the clearly defined stages of infancy, youth, manhood, age, and each has its own peculiar advantages and joys. In the natural world we usually associate with winter the ideas of sunless skies and dreary days; but the moral equivalents of these things are not at all necessary in the corresponding period of the life of the believer. His head may be white with the snows of many winters; in his heart there may be eternal spring. And so the lengthening of the shadows and the deepening of the twilight should have in them no cause for sorrow. "Looked at hopefully, grey hairs are the streaks of the dawn of the eternal day."

"They call it going down the hill when we are growing old; And speak with mournful accents when our years are nearly told; They sigh when talking of the past—the days that used to be—As if the future were not bright with immortality.

But oh! it is not going down, 'tis climbing higher—higher, Until we almost see the mansions that our souls desire; For if the natural eye grows dim, it is but dim to earth, While the eye of faith grows keener, to perceive the Saviour's worth.

Those by-gone days, though days of joy, we wish not back again; Were there not also many days of sorrow and of pain? But in the days awaiting us, the days beyond the tomb, Sorrow shall find no place, but joys unmarred for ever bloom. For though in truth the outward man must perish and decay, The inner man shall be renewed by grace from day to day; They who are planted by the Lord, unshaken in their root, Even in old age shall flourish, and still bring forth rich fruit.

It is not years that make men old, the spirit may be young, Though for the threescore years and ten the wheels of life have run; God has Himself recorded, in His blessed Word of truth, That they who wait upon the Lord, these shall renew their youth.

And when the eyes, now dim, shall open to behold the King, And on the head, now hoary, shall be placed the crown of gold, Then shall be known the lasting joy of never growing old."

5. 22, 23—will be seen in mellowed perfection as we abide in the courts of the Lord. Finally, there is the promise that has cheered so very many as they descended to the valley of the shadow, namely, that there shall be

(3) *Light at eventide*

"It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light" (Zechariah 14. 7). "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60. 19, 20).

Come now, beloved, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60. 1).

Once more, may we say a word about

ITS ANTICIPATIONS

"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14. 1-3).

Here we have set before us the prospects of all believers in Christ—young and old: the Father's house, the many mansions, the prepared place, the return of our Saviour, our going to meet Him, and our eternal felicity in His presence. Our strong conviction is that the coming of the Lord Jesus is on the very eve of becoming an accomplished fact; and that, old as some of us are, we shall not see death.

Whilst, however, the Word of the Lord declares the

nor the confirmed faith I now have in the moral order of the Universe, and in the unfailing mercies and love of God, for all the bright but uncertain hopes and tumultuous joys of youth. Indeed, I would not!

These are the best years of my life—the sweetest, and the most free from anxious care. The way grows brighter; the birds sing more sweetly; the winds blow softer; the sun shines more radiantly than ever before. I suppose "my outward man" is perishing, but "my inward man" is being joyously renewed day by day.

Some lessons learned, or partially learned, we here pass on:

1. *The blessedness of having faith in God*—in His providence; in His superintending care; in His unfailing love, *rejoicing in both*. The bitter may be better for us than the sweet. It is unhelpful to grow impatient and fretful, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Victory is to be attained through the joyful acceptance of annoying trials and petty vexations as a part of God's discipline (James 1. 2-7).

3. *The importance of keeping a heart full of love toward everybody*. We should learn to be patient with folks who try our patience. If we cannot love them with complacency, then let us love them with compassion and pity; but let us love them, and pray for them; and do not let us carry about with us hard thoughts and feelings toward them!

4. *The folly of wasting time and frittering away faith by living in the past*; by mourning over the failures of yesterday, and the long ago. It is better to commit them to God, and look upward and onward. "Forgetting those things which are behind," said Paul, "and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the

### ITS LIMITATIONS

One may no longer be equal to the heavy physical tasks once undertaken so easily. The eye may have become dim, the ear dull, the breath short, the heart faint, the hand unsteady, and the golden bowl of life seem nigh to breaking.

But what distresses even more than these, perhaps, is the falling of the memory: one cannot remember even the promises or the precepts which, in one's younger days, one could repeat so easily. A Christian once complained to an aged man, that he was much discouraged in reading the Scriptures, because he could not fasten on his memory what he had read. The older friend bade him take a pitcher and fill it with water. This being done, he bade him empty it out and wipe the pitcher. The other wondered to what this tended. "Now," said the older man, "though no water remains in it, yet the pitcher is cleaner than it was before; and though thy memory retains not what thou readest, yet thy heart is the cleaner for God's Word having passed through it."

There is, however, a much more comforting reflection than even that one and it is this, namely, that, if we forget the promises, God never forgets them. The editor of *The King's Business* tells how, as a young preacher, he received one morning a message saying: "Father Junkins is dying, and he wants to see you, Pastor." The dying man was eighty-seven years of age and was the outstanding Christian of the village. With fear and trembling God's servant went to him, praying as he did so: "O God, give me a message for this dying saint." When he entered the sick chamber, the dear old man said: "Oh, Pastor, I am dying. For years I have been feasting on the promises of God, but this morning when I woke up I could not remember one of them. What shall I do?" "Then," says Dr. White, "God gave me an answer on which, after visiting the bed-sides of scores

which was given to me by a dear old lady whom I met in the heart of the native territories of South Africa, and who in her youth was the friend of the children of David Livingstone.

"Labour and sorrow, the Psalmist said,  
Were the gift of the fourscore years;  
And he almost envied the sleeping dead,  
Escaped from the vale of tears.  
But the Psalmist's heart was over-wrought,  
And his harp was out of tune;  
For the fourscore years to me have brought  
The sunny days of June.  
'Tis true that the eyes are somewhat dim,  
And the step not quite so fast;  
But my blessing-cup is full to the brim,  
And life's best wine is the last.  
For the vintage of the western slopes  
Has a fragrance all its own,  
From the gathered memories and hopes  
Which the summer suns have grown.  
Not lost are the friends of earlier days,  
They are with me in memory still;  
I can join them in thought, in prayer and praise,  
As I climb the heavenly hill;  
And the upward climb of the fourscore years  
Has set the horizon wide;  
While looking down on the sands, one hears  
The beat of eternity's tide.  
And so I sing of the beautiful years,  
Each one with His goodness crowned;  
And better far than my foolish fears  
Were its months and seasons found.  
So now, with my fourscore years, I wait  
Till I hear the higher call,  
And I pass within though the pearly gate  
To the heaven which crowns them all."

So much for old age itself : now let us think of some of the things which usually accompany it. We must, of course, remember

mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ

Jesus."  
"Oh! the joy of living a life of service; of love; and of growing up into Him in all things, which is the Head—even Christ! Such a life is never old, but is eternally renewing itself; eternally youthful, like a springing, sparkling fountain that is fed by falling waters that flow down from the heights of the everlasting hills. Halle-lujah!"

That lovely quotation reminds us how small a part wealth plays in the securing of true happiness. Money has been defined as *a universal provider of everything but happiness, and a passport to everywhere but heaven*. A tax collector one day came to a poor minister in order to assess the value of his property, and to determine the amount of his taxes.

"I am a rich man," said the minister.

The official quickly sharpened his pencil and asked intently: "Well, what do you own?"

The minister replied: "I am the possessor of a Saviour who earned for me everlasting life, and Who has prepared a place for me in the Eternal City."

"What else?"  
"I have a brave, pious wife, and Solomon says: 'Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.'"

"What else?"

"Healthy and obedient children."

"What else?"

"A merry heart which enables me to pass through life joyfully."

"What else?"

"That is all," replied the minister.

The official closed his book, arose, took his hat and said: "You are indeed a rich man, sir, but your property is not subject to taxation."

And now let me close this little section with a poem