

FAITH'S ALCHEMY

Some statements of the Bible seem as startling and impossible as the dream of the philosopher's stone. Surely, it is as easy to turn all things into gold as to verify the promise that "no good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly." Where are the people who possess all good things? Not the adherents of any favored sect, for then all controversy would cease, and faith give place to sight. Shall we take refuge in the limitation of the promise to those who walk uprightly, and reply that until we find persons who never waver, stoop, or stumble, it cannot be said the promise has failed? But it is addressed to fallible mortals, and by the upright must be meant those who, in spite of failing, honestly and habitually try to be right with God. Do persons enjoy all things generally regarded as good? This is not the teaching of the Bible. It is unfair to interpret any book or document by the meaning we choose to place on some sentence opposed to the general tenor of it. The Bible in all its teachings and narratives shows that "many are the afflictions of the righteous." No one is invited to be a Christian by the bribe of receiving all the things the world accounts "good."

What then, is the meaning of the promise? That is good which is for our complete and lasting advantage. A bed in a garden may be cultivated, a wing of a house decorated, a member of the body cared for, so as to entail injury on the whole. It would not, therefore, be a good thing. A child may be gratified by a berry or a toy, which may prove a fatal injury. Bitter medicine, a painful operation, a difficult task, though regarded by the child as very evil, may be good things, no wise parent would withhold. As the physical nature is developed by exercise, and the mental by education, so the spiritual by the discipline of trial. If thus, we are trained to the conquest of self-will,

to filial submission, and confidence toward God, it is a good thing of supreme value.

The present life is the childhood, the training time of eternity. If, then, a transitory grief helps to fit us for everlasting bliss, it must be good, and not evil. But who can tell what is thus good? We feel present pain and pleasure, but cannot see their spiritual results. It is not necessary, it is not possible that we should. God does, and he has the power so to overrule all things as to secure the desired end. We do not argue the matter with unbelievers. They point to our poverty, sickness, disappointments, desires unsatisfied, prayers apparently refused; and in the faith God's Word warrants and his Spirit produces, we reply with Faber:

"Ills that God blesses are my good –
All unblessed good is ill;
And all is right that seems most wrong,
If it be His dear will."

This is the alchemy that turns sorrow into joy, sickness into health, death into life. It is illustrated in the history of God's children. We see it in the case of Joseph, Moses, David, and Asaph. (Psa. 73.) St. Paul learned to glory in the thorn in the flesh.

Things are not what they seem. God alone perceives their true value and lasting results. He is infinitely wise, and cannot err; infinitely strong, and cannot fail; infinitely kind, and cannot neglect. He will keep back nothing that is good, nor give us what would injure. This is our culture time.

That is best which promotes the fruitfulness in which God delights, and which will be our own true glory by his grace. Christians must not judge of things as men do whose possessions and hopes are limited by the present. We are pilgrims, and must estimate circumstances in view of their influence, not so much in making us comfortable on our way as in helping us home. Nobler aims involve

severer toil; fiercer conflicts, costlier sacrifice. If we seek a nobler goal, let us not envy others their smoother path. If we would win a richer prize, we must fight a sterner battle. If we would attain a loftier height, we must clamber up sharper crags.

– Newman Hall.