

## **STUMBLING STONES OR STEPPING STONES.**

I have been sorely tried, dear Lord, been sorely tried today,  
The sun has veiled his brightness and a cloud hangs o'er my way.  
Why is my heart so heavy, and the daylight cold and gray?  
I've tried to please thee; I have striven to faithful be and true;  
I've sought for heavenly wisdom in the thing that I should do,  
Yet I've been "put to grief;" and oh, can I have grieved thee, too?  
A fellow pilgrim on the road a wound has given to me,  
Its sting and smart I keenly feel, – its need I cannot see.  
Stumbling stone or stepping stone, O Lord, which shall it be?

A sorrow came to me today – a grief so dense and deep,  
The shades of deepest darkness about my heartstrings creep;  
The tears have flowed unceasing till no power is left to weep.  
I bow beneath my weight of woe, speechless and stunned; my heart  
Sinks down like lead within my breast; its bitter ache and smart  
Seem almost more than I can bear. A sharp and cruel dart  
Has pierced me, and I prostrate lie. O Father, speak to me!  
Thy hand lies hard upon me: can this trial come from thee?  
Stepping stone or stumbling stone, which shall this sorrow be?

A blessing came this day to me, a joy surpassing sweet.  
A glad way opens up to me, wherein my willing feet  
Turn joyfully; how blest am I within this dear retreat!  
My way had dark and lonely been for many a weary year;  
My Lord has brought this gift to me when all was sad and drear;  
Now, where my path was bleak, the flowers of love and bliss appear.  
And yet, dear Lord, this blessing which thy love has given to me  
May fill my heart too fully, and may wean my soul from thee.  
Then, stepping stone or stumbling stone, my God, which shall it be?

Momentous question! on its answer my eternal joy

Hangs trembling; shall I be refined as gold without alloy?  
These woes and blessings potent are to save or to destroy.  
The time flies on! the "harvest" wanes, the glorious end is near!  
O, Master, shall I lose e'en now the "prize" I hold so dear?  
Shall I be lured by siren song, while strains of heaven break  
On ears attuned? Oh, guide me, Lord and keep me still awake.  
May I rejoice to walk with thee, and suffer for thy sake.

But I am weak; O, Master dear, do thou my spirit thrill,  
Grant me thy grace, and strength impart to do thy perfect will,  
And in affliction or in joy obey and love thee still.  
Almighty Lord, to thee I fly – no other help I know;  
Oh, aid me in my need, I pray, and make my heart to glow  
With holy fire, and on me, Lord, thy precious love bestow.  
I hear thee speak, I will obey, I stretch my hands to thee,  
In every providence of thine thy changeless love I see,  
And stepping stones to heavenly heights each pain and joy shall be.

– *Alice G. James.*

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