

***"Many are my persecutors and mine enemies;
yet do I not decline from thy testimonies."***

Psalm 119:157

David's experience is common to us all. *Many*, indeed, *are our persecutors and enemies*. This is a solemn cost. Let those who are setting out in the Christian course count it well. From neglect of our Lord's rule of Scriptural calculation (Luke, xiv. 28-33), many seem to begin well; but they have been "hindered" (Gal. v. 7; iii. 3)--they turn back; they are zealous but inconsiderate; warm-hearted, but ignorant of themselves, their work, and their resources. They were allured at first, perhaps, by an interest in the Gospel--some delusive excitement of love to the Saviour--the picture of the paths of "pleasantness and peace" (Prov. iii. 17), or the joys of heaven. The cross was out of sight, and out of mind. But this promise of ease and happiness was no less foolish and unwarrantable, than that of a soldier, utterly forgetful of his profession, and who should promise himself peace at the very time that he was called out to the wars. Surely, if like God's ancient people, we begin our road in sunshine, it is well to be provided against the storms, which will soon overtake us. (Exod. xv. 1; xvi. 1-3.) We would say therefore to all--specially to sanguine beginners--Let your course be commenced with serious consideration, and zealous self-scrutiny. Beware of hasty determinations. See to it, that your resources are drawn, not from your own resolutions, or from the sincerity and ardour of your love; but from the fulness that is treasured up in Jesus for your present distress. Feel every step of your way by the light of the sacred word. If you expect Christian consistency to command the esteem of an ungodly world, you have forgotten both your Master's word and example (John, xv. 20); and you will soon be ready to exclaim--*Many are my persecutors, and mine enemies*. For if their hostility is not always active, the enmity "is not dead, but sleepeth." If, however, their unexpected surprisals and inveteracy should daunt you in the conflict, you are again forgetting the word of cheering support in the most awful crisis--"*My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Cor. xii. 9.) Thus the word of God will be "the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." (2 Cor. vi. 7.) Presumption is cast down, self-confidence is humbled, and the trembling simplicity of dependence upon an Almighty arm is upheld and honoured.

Count then upon the difficulties that beset the heavenly path. You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon, if you are afraid of being pricked by the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown, if you flinch from the cross in the way to it. Oh! think of the honour of bearing this cross. It is conformity to the Son of God. Let the mind be deeply imbued with the remembrance of his daily cross of suffering and reproach; and we shall gladly "*go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach,*" yea--*even "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame"* (Heb. xiii. 13. Acts, v. 41) with him and for him. Indeed, what is our love, if we will not take up a cross for him? How can we be his followers, without his cross? (See Matt. xvi. 24.) How can we be Christians, if we are not confessors of Christ before a world that despises his Gospel?

But a steady, consistent profession is no matter of course. The crown is not easily won. *Many are our persecutors, and our enemies*. Persecution, to the false professor, is an

occasion of apostasy (Matt. xiii. 20,21); to the faithful servant of Christ, it is the trial of his faith (1 Pet. i. 6,7), the source of his richest consolations (Matt. v. 10-12. Acts, xiii. 50-52. 1 Pet. iv. 12-16), the guard of his profession (Matt. x. 16. Phil. ii. 14-16), and the strength of his perseverance. (Acts, xx. 22-24.) It drives him to his God. He casts himself upon his Saviour for immediate refuge and support; and the *quickening* influence, which he had just been seeking, enables him to say--*Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.* Thus did the great Apostle, at the time, when his *persecutors were many*, and human help even from his friends had failed him, maintain an unshaken confidence in the service of his God--"At my first answer"--he tells us--"no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding, the Lord *stood with me, and strengthened me.*" (2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.) David himself often acknowledged the same principle of perseverance under similar trials--"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be, which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But *Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter-up of my head. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.*" (Ps. iii. 1-3; cxl. 7.)

But have we never taken a devious path in *declining from the Lord's testimonies*, to escape the appointed cross? Do we never shrink from "the voice of him that reproacheth" and blasphemeth, by reason of the enemy and the avenger? Can we always in the integrity of our heart appeal to an Omniscient God--"*All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant; our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way: though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death?*" (Ps. xlv. 16-19.) This profession is not the foolish confidence of boasting; but the fulfilment of the covenant promise--"I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." (Jer. xxxii. 40.) So beautifully does the promise of perseverance connect itself with the duty of persevering! And so clearly in this, as in every other way, does the "wrath of man" ("howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so") "praise God." (Comp. Isa. x. 7, with Ps. lxxvi. 10.) How glorious is the display of the power of his grace in the constancy of his people! like the rocks in the ocean, immoveable amidst the fury of the waves; like the trees of the forest, "rooted and stablished" by every shaking of the tempest! Must not the world, in witnessing the total defeat of their enmity against the Lord's people (or rather its eventual results in their increased prosperity), be constrained to confess to the honour of God, "*Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel--What hath God wrought!*" (Num. xxiii. 23.)