

***"My soul melteth for heaviness;
strengthen thou me according unto thy word."***

Psalm 119:28

Is this David, "whose heart is as the heart of a lion, here utterly *melting*?" (2 Sam. xvii. 10. Comp. Josh. vii. 5; Ps. cvii. 26.) But the sorrows, as the joys of the spiritual man--dealing immediately with the Infinite and Eternal God--are beyond conception. (See Job, xxxiv. 29.) Ordinary courage may support under the trials of this life; but when "the arrows of the Almighty are within us, the poison thereof drinketh up our spirit." (Job, vi. 4. Comp. Prov. xviii. 14.) How, then, can the Christian's lot be so enviable, when their *souls* thus *melt for heaviness*? But this, be it remembered, is only "for a season." There is a "needs-be" for it, while it remains: and in the end it "will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory." (1 Pet. i. 6, 7. Comp. Ps. xxx. 5.) Never, perhaps, are their graces more lively, or the ground of their assurance more clear, than in these seasons of sorrow. They complain, indeed, of the diversified power of indwelling sin. But their very complaints are the evidence of the mighty working of indwelling grace. For what is it but the principle of faith, that makes unbelief their burden? What but hope, that struggles with their tears? What but love, that makes their coldness a grief? What but humility, that causes them to loathe their pride. What but the secret spring of thankfulness, that shows them their unthankfulness, and shames them for it? And, therefore, the very depth of "that *heaviness* which *melts their souls*" away, is the exhibition of the strength of God's work within, upholding them in perseverance of conflict to the end. Would not the believer then, when eyeing in his heaviest moments the most prosperous condition of the ungodly, say--"Let me not eat of their dainties?" (Ps. cxli. 4.) Far better, and, we may add, far happier, is godly sorrow than worldly joy. In the midst of his misery, the Christian would not exchange his hope in the gospel--though often obscured by unbelief, and clouded by fear--for all "the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." "If the heart knoweth his own bitterness, a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."¹ Yet the bitterness is keenly felt. Sin displeases a tender and gracious Father. (Ps. li. 4.) It has "pierced" the heart that loves him (Zech. xii. 10); and shed the blood that saves him. It grieves (Eph. iv. 30) the indwelling Comforter of his soul. God expects to see him a mourner; and he feels he has reason enough to mourn--"*My soul melteth for heaviness.*"

But this cry of distress is sometimes that of the child under his Father's needful chastisement. The world is dethroned, but not extirpated, in the heart. Much dross is yet to be removed. The sources of the too attractive earthly joy must be embittered: and now it is that the discipline of the cross forces the cry--"*My soul melteth for heaviness.*" Yet in the midst of heaviness, the child of God cannot forget that he is loved--that he is saved; and the recollection of this sovereign mercy makes his tears of godly sorrow, tears of joy.

But this *melting heaviness* has not wrought its work, until it has bowed us before the throne of grace with the pleading cry of faith--*Strengthen thou me!* For do we stand by the strength of our own resolutions or habits of grace? Unless the Lord renew his supply from

¹ Prov. xiv. 10. "A good man lying on his bed of sickness, and being asked, Which were the most comfortable days that he ever knew? cried out--O give me my *mourning* days; give me my mourning days again, for they were the joyfulest days that ever I had."--Brookes, *Works*.

moment to moment, all is frail and withering. But what burden or difficulty is too great for Almighty strength? "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small." (Isa. xli. 14, 15.) And especially is our success assured, when the plea is drawn, as it is repeatedly in this Psalm (Verses 25, 41, 58, &c.)--*according to thy word*. For what does that word assure us?--"As thy days, so shall thy strength be." (Deut. xxxiii. 25.) "Will he plead against me"--said Job--"with his great power? No; but he will put strength in me." (Job, xxiii. 6.) Thus David found it in his own case: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." (Ps. cxxxviii. 3.) Thus also to the Apostle was the promise given and fulfilled: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. xii. 9.) And is not "the God of Israel" still "he that giveth strength and power unto his people" (Ps. lxviii. 35)? still the same "faithful God, who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it?" (1 Cor. x. 13.)

When we are most sensible of our utter helplessness, and most simple in our reliance upon Divine strength, then it is, that the "*soul melting for heaviness*," is most especially upheld and established. "*Heaviness* in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad." (Prov. xii. 25.) And how reviving is that "good word" of the Gospel, which proclaims the Saviour anointed to "give the garment of praise for the spirit of *heaviness*" (Isa. lxi. 3), and gifted with "the tongue of the learned, that he might know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary!" (Isa. l. 4.) And no less encouraging is it to view *Him "melting for heaviness"* (Ps. xxii. 14)--"sore amazed, and very heavy" under the accumulated weight of imputed guilt; learning by this bitter discipline, "in that he himself suffered being tempted, to succour them that are tempted." (Mark, xiv. 33; with Heb. ii. 18.) Yet was he, like his faithful servant, *strengthened according to his Father's word*, in the moment of his bitterest agony, by the agency of his own creation. (Luke, xxii. 43; with 2 Cor. xii. 8,9.) And this faithful support, vouchsafed to the Head, is the seal and pledge of what every member in every trouble will most assuredly enjoy. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in his people, so their consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor. i. 5.) The blessed word will supply all their need--life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support--"*Strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*"

Lord, may I ever be kept from despondency--regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonourable to thy name, and weakening to my soul; and though I must "needs be sometimes in heaviness through manifold temptations," yet let the power of faith be in constant exercise, that I may be able to expostulate with my soul--"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Ps. xlii. 11.)