

ST CYPRIAN ON ADVERSITY¹

YOU who fear God and hold the Faith should be of a ready spirit for all things. Though your portion be the loss of wealth, or this unceasing ravage and agony of disease; though your wife be taken from you, or your children or your friends, yet shall such pain, such separation and such gloom be unto you not an offence but a combat. Let them not break your faith, O Christian, but shew forth your valour in the struggle, since the hurt of present ills shall be taken lightly in the confidence of the good things to come. When victory is attained, the crown is won; but without combat there can be no conquest. For the pilot is discerned in the storm, and the soldier proved in the field: and a trial of endurance is no trial when there is no danger, the combat real only when the foe is real. A tree which stands fast upon depth of root is not put about by the winds that roar down upon it, the ship is not broken by the waves, that rests firmly on its cable, and when the corn is wrought upon the threshing floor, it is but the empty chaff that is wafted thence. Wherefore Paul the Apostle, after perils and imprisonings, after shipwreck and strife and having moreover a thorn of his flesh to buffet him, nevertheless was bettered and proved rather than worn away in his being, by evil things and uncomfortable fortune. *The furnace proveth the potter's vessels.*

What greatness, then, of spirit it will be, to battle undaunted against disease and desolation, to instance in blindness and in death the substance of our faith! How glorious, not lying prostrate with those empty of our hope in God, to stand, unbending among the ruins of the race! Dearest brethren, the kingdom of God is nigh; the reward of life, the joy of eternal health and everlasting happiness, the possession of Paradise, until lately lost, these heavenly things are already upon us, while the shadow of this world already starts to flee away. Let him only fear to die who is without title in the Cross, him only who shall pass from this present departing unto a second and eternal death.

Some there are who distrust themselves because the disease has

¹ From the 9th Treatise (written at the time of the Great Mortality)—translated and adapted by J. F. T. Prince.

attacked, with the same fury and effect, believers as much as the heathen: as though the object of a Christian's faith were this, to enjoy the happiness of this world and the good things of life, impervious to the contacts of evil! Yet should we be as those who here bear every adverse thing, with confidence of future joy. For until *this corruptible put on incorruption and this mortal obtain immortality*, and the spirit guide us unto God our Father, whatever troubles the flesh is our portion with the common lot of men. Disease of the eyes, attacks of fever, disabilities of the limbs, all is common to us so long as the common flesh remains with us in this present world. Nay! the Christian (when he has understood the very condition upon which he believes) may well have more to tolerate of pain than other men. *In pain endure and in thy low estate have patience.*

Let us embrace the day that shall make us over, each one of us, to his appointed resting place. What man that travels abroad doth not make haste, and evermore hasten, back to his native land, unless thereto he has been a traitor? Who that are speeding home over the sea pray not for a prosperous wind that they may the sooner hold in their arms the dear ones they have left? Paradise we must account to be our native land: wherefore not haste to behold our country? It is a large and a loving company that awaits us there, a manifold and numerous assembly that longs after us!

O sweet and heavenly realms where death can never terrify and life can never end!

O Perfect and Perpetual Bliss!