

II

Happy in Life and in Death

OCTOBER 21, 1855.

“For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”—PHIL. i. 19-26.

I WISH, my dear friends, to draw your attention to the light in which the holy apostle here considers life and death. Observe in the first place this expression, which is, as it were, the starting-point and motto of his Christian life: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That is to say, my life, my natural life that I live today and may lose tomorrow, is only employed in following and serving Jesus Christ. “To die is gain,” this does not require explanation. Here the apostle asks himself whether it would be better for him to live or to die. This question has often presented itself to us, and perhaps we have answered as the apostle did; but, it is to be feared, in a very different feeling. When we have desired death, it rather meant, “I know not which is most fearful, the afflictions of life, from which death would deliver me, or the terrors of death, from which life preserves me;” that is to say, that life and death appear like two evils, between which we do not know which is the least. To the apostle they appeared as two immense blessings, of which he doubted which was the greatest. Personally, he would have preferred to die, in order to be with Christ; but for the Church and the world he preferred to live, that he might serve Jesus Christ, spread His kingdom, and win souls to Him. What an admirable view of life and death, admirable because governed and sanctified by love; and it is the view which Jesus Christ took of them himself. Let us endeavour to enter into this sentiment. Life is a blessing, death is a blessing. Death is a blessing because it delivers us from the miseries of this life, and especially because, even though life put us in possession of all the joys that earth can offer, death opens to us an enjoyment and a glory of which we can form no idea. We ought then to consider death as desirable in itself, and not seek to put aside all that reminds us of it. Let every disease, every sudden death, every passing event serve to remind us that to each of us it may come at any moment. Life also is a blessing, because in it we can serve Jesus Christ, glorify Jesus Christ, imitate Jesus Christ: it is not worth living for anything else. All our strength, our breath, our life, our faculties, ought to be consecrated, devoted, sanctified, crucified for the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. This crucified life is the happy life in which, even in the midst of the bitterest earthly sorrows, we can

taste and spread around us the most precious blessings. Let us love life and feel the value of it, that we may fill it with Jesus Christ. Such a principle can only be attained by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. But let us observe that it is not only that our own spirit must be supported, consoled, strengthened; it is that the Spirit of God must come and dwell in us. We often labour to improve ourselves and cultivate our minds; we do well; but that is not sufficient. We must have more. Jesus Christ himself must dwell in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

O my friends! let us consider what are the promises of the gospel, and we shall see how far we are from being in the possession or the enjoyment of them. May God open the windows of heaven above and reveal them to us, fill us with all wisdom, and show us that even here below we can attain to a perfect joy, until we arrive at the full fruition of felicity and victory. And may He teach us thankfully to gather the blessings which He pours down upon the earth which opens to receive them, in order to show that if the world can sadden or trouble us, it is not able to extinguish the gracious gifts of heaven, nor to annihilate the promises of God, nor to throw a veil, nor even the slightest cloud, over the love with which God has loved us in Jesus Christ.