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whose soldier boy has
made the supreme sac-
rifice, and for all others
whose hearts are going out
with tenderness toward our
fallen but immortal heroes**

Your Fallen Soldier Boy Still Lives

By

EDWARD LEIGH PELL

*Author of "Our Troublesome Religious Questions,"
"What Did Jesus Really Teach
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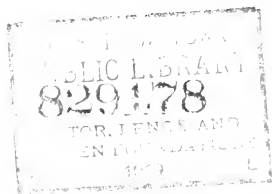
Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON

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FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY



Printed in the United States of America

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 North Wabash Ave.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 75 Princes Street

*To a Father
Whose Son Has Made
The Supreme Sacrifice*

I know not where his islands lift
 Their froned palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
 Beyond his love and care.

—*Whittier.*

I

MY DEAR B——:

The other day a friend stopped me on the street, took me by the hand, squeezed it hard, and without looking into my face or uttering a word, passed on. If I could do that now I too could pass on without a word. For you would know the one thing I want you to know just now. You would know that I know. I too have passed that road and I know. I know every foot of the way. I know how dark it is; how bitter, bitter cold it

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is. And I know how utterly beyond human remedy it is.

No man need tell me that he has a philosophy that will cure it all. I know better. There is not a man who has walked through the Valley of the Shadow that does not know better. I have known some poor fools who thought they had invented a remedy, but they had never been there. We have been making great strides in our time and we have come very near subduing the earth; but of one thing I am sure: no mere man will ever take the chill out of that valley or pierce its blackness with a single gleam.

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Yet here I am writing to you, and I am writing with hope. Do I imagine that I can help you? I might as well be frank: I am writing from impulse rather than from design. A father never loses a son that other fathers who have lost their sons do not feel his pain; and at such a time one *must* say something. Still, as I said, I am writing with hope.

It may interest you to know that this letter is written in the School of Sorrow. I want you to know this because it has been my lot to spend much of my time here, and because I would remind you that in this school one does not study books. What little we learn we

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get at first hand. I may as well admit that I have learned very little. I have been such a dull pupil that I have had to go over the same grade time and again. But I have learned two or three things which I hope I shall never forget.

One of these is that much of the darkness that settles down upon us in our sorrows is due to accidental circumstances. In your case there is the accidental circumstance of place. How often your heart has been wrenched and torn by questions that never would have risen if you had been there! If you could only have been with him in his last days! If you could only know what he

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thought and felt and said and did! If you could only know what was in his mind and heart about his loved ones, about himself, about his God, about his future! And then there comes up that awful question about immortality—something that never comes to the father who has had the privilege of looking into his son's eyes at the last conscious moment.

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II

One golden September day I stood beside a beautiful boy who had been suddenly called from play to face the realities of the Unseen. He had obeyed the summons without a murmur, and now stood before the Gate to Light with that strange calmness which we have learned to recognize as God's last gift to His own before they go hence. His glorious intellect, to the last untouched by sickness or narcotics, was as clear as a sunbeam, and as he waited he

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talked with his mother with perfect reasonableness, first of things on this side the partition, and then, as the gate began to open, of things beyond. Through it all no one watching those wonderful eyes could discover the faintest sign of fear. He was not looking for his life to be blown out like a candle. He was not approaching his end. He was not dissolving into nothing. He was not dropping into eternal sleep. He was only going away. And as he passed his countenance showed that he was not disappointed.

That boy's father suffered many things in that hour and afterwards; but

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one thing he was spared. His bleeding heart was not dug into by the horrible interrogation point that our cruel rationalism has provided for such a time. It did not occur to him to ask, "What does science say about it?"

I wish we could begin to think sanely about science. I know this war is helping us. We are becoming more discriminating. We even dare to question some things that science has labelled. But somehow we still fail to distinguish between the true scientist, whose modesty is as profound as his knowledge, and the self-appointed priest of science, whose only noticeable distinction is an

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unquenchable craving for the footlights. A brilliant young fellow whose opinions about anything concerning this life would be as hard to sell on the street as the speculations of a newsboy, stands before an audience and solemnly asserts that science has no word of hope for the man whose son has fallen in France. And instantly a horror of great darkness settles down upon the house and every father who has lost a son feels the floor giving way beneath his feet.

And it never occurs to anybody to ask for that young fellow's credentials. It never occurs to anybody that he

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might have made a thousand similar statements that were just as true and nobody would have attached the slightest significance to them. He might have said, for example, that religion offers no word of hope to the inventor who is seeking to overcome the submarine menace. That would have been just as true as his statement that science offers no word of hope to the man whose son has fallen in France. But would anybody have felt the floor give way beneath his feet?

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III

We are still pointing with pride to the modern man's successful revolt from Authority, and to the marvellous progress which we have made as a people since the day we rose in our manhood and rescued ourselves from ecclesiastical tyranny. But we might as well face the truth. The modern man has succeeded pretty well in rescuing himself from physical slavery, but he is still to taste the sweets of intellectual freedom. Everybody who knows any-

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thing knows that we did not rescue ourselves from ecclesiastical tyranny: we simply stood by and let the priests of science do it for us. That is evident from the fact that the moment our ancient tyrants got off our backs the priests of science got on. "Our successful revolt against Authority," when we come to look at it in the pitiless light of history, was simply a change of masters. Plaster the thing over as we may, we cannot cover up the fact that as a people we no more dare to think beyond the lines that our priests of science have chalked down for us than the average man of medieval times dared to think

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beyond the lines that his ecclesiastical masters chalked down for him. We think we have escaped Authority, but we have only turned from the authority of religion to the authority of science.

It is all very well to say that the old time priests of religion often put forward their own opinions in the name of religion on matters concerning which religion had never uttered a word, but what we need to remember just now is that there are priests of science who often put forward their own opinions in the name of science on matters concerning which science has never uttered a word. Science is never unscientific.

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Science would never try to pick a thought out of your brain with a hat-pin. It would never try to grasp something in the sphere of the spirit with a pair of material tongs and then insist that the something did not exist because the tongs could not grasp it. But some scientists are not scientific. The young professor who is always coming forward to the footlights to remind us that science is unable to find any evidence of the immortality of the soul, is no more scientific than I would be if I should announce that after a thousand faithful attempts to pick a thought out of a human brain with a

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hat-pin, I am unable to offer any evidence that there are any thoughts in the human brain to pick out.

Science has never uttered a word on the subject of the immortality of the soul. Its sphere is the material world and it does not presume to have an opinion about anything outside of its sphere. What one hears on the subject of immortality from supposed scientific sources is not the utterance of science at all, but simply an expression of opinion by a disciple of science—usually a very youthful disciple—concerning a matter that lies beyond the sphere of science. In other words, it is

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the opinion of a layman, or outsider, and the opinion of a layman or outsider should be considered as such, regardless of whether it comes from a scientist or a chore boy. A crusty old bachelor's opinion that there is no such thing as mother-love is the opinion of an outsider, and the fact that he happens to be a scientist does not make him a better authority on the subject than my old black mammy, who has no opinion about it at all, but just knows.

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IV

You cannot settle this question of the immortality of your son by appealing to science, any more than you can settle it by appealing to your bank. The fact is it is not the question of his immortality that is to be settled at all; it is simply the question of the existence of our spirits. If you can settle that, there will be no question of immortality. We cannot conceive of a spirit as mortal. A spirit is something that is not material—something whose existence is

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not affected by the things of time and sense; and the moment we know that we are spirits we know that we are immortal. And the question of the existence of our spirits cannot be settled from without. No question concerning our own essential nature can be settled from without. It can only be settled by our own consciousness or experience. Both science and religion may help me into a position where I shall have a better chance to discover my spirit, but neither science nor religion can discover my spirit for me.

Our hope of immortality does not exist because we have thought it out or

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argued ourselves into it. It is not a mere intellectual conquest. The father who recently wrote in a popular magazine how he came to believe in immortality when he found himself facing the possibility of never seeing his soldier boy again, was no doubt sincere in his insistence that he arrived at his faith by a process of reasoning; but his story tells a different tale. His story shows that he arrived at it simply because a tragic circumstance brought him face to face with immortality itself, and held him there long enough for him to *realize* it.

The soldier who said that nobody in

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the trenches ever doubts immortality suggested a fact that is as old as the race. You can put a thing out of your life and thought so completely that it will cease to exist for you. It will not cease to exist, but it will cease to exist for you. A nervous trouble that keeps you away from music may bring you, in the course of twenty years or so, to a point where you will not be able to realize any essential difference between a Beethoven symphony and a small boy's strenuous rappings upon his mother's dish-pan. I once knew a man who put love out of his life in his youth and kept it out until it passed so far beyond all

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belief that in his old age it was impossible for him to think of even mother-love as anything more than a chemical phenomenon. Music exists for those who give themselves a chance to realize it. So does love. So does God. So does immortality.

The experience of that father is the experience of thousands. The damage is often done in youth. A young fellow at college passes upon the great questions of life with the same ease and assurance of finality that he passes upon a basket of apples. He chooses all the apples and beliefs that look good to his eyes and the garbage-can gets the rest.

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And as he is at the age when the things which look good to the eyes are usually material and not spiritual, it often happens that such unenticing and unuseful beliefs as the existence of a personal God and the immortality of the soul find their way to the garbage-can.

You never deliberately go after your discarded apples or your discarded beliefs, and while you may inadvertently stumble upon the one, nothing but one of life's great tragedies is likely to bring you up against the other. That was what happened to the father who thought he had settled the question of immortality by logic. By his youthful

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choice at college he had shut immortality out of his life and thought, and in the course of time it had ceased to exist for him. Perhaps it would never have existed for him again if that horrible specter of death hovering over his son had not brought him squarely up against it.

But all the damage is not done in youth. I know men who find it difficult to believe in immortality to-day simply because they spent their yesterdays too far away from it to realize it. From their school-days until now they have been cheating themselves out of the chance to discover their own spirits.

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This of course is not peculiar to this generation, but it is a safe guess that civilized man never did it quite so successfully as he has been doing it since the day the wonderful achievements of modern science turned him from his pursuit of the things of the spirit, and plunged him headlong into this frightful material maelstrom which we call our modern civilization. No wonder the things of the spirit have become so unreal. If the world had been as completely absorbed in spiritual ideas and ideals for the last twenty years as it was in material ideas and ideals, it would to-day be so skeptical of the ex-

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istence of matter, that it would take half the race to serve as traffic policemen to keep the other half from being run over on the street.

We might as well face the truth. The man of to-day is not going to be really convinced of his immortality until he has discovered his own spirit, and he is not likely to discover his own spirit so long as he follows a daily program that cheats him out of every chance he has to come face to face with his spirit. Here is the quiet hour on one hand, and the tragical side of life on the other. It is only when we are alone in a stillness that can be felt, or when, as in

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some sudden tragedy, this wall that separates us from the unseen comes down with a crash, or, as in a slow tragedy, gradually crumbles away, that the average man of to-day is likely to come face to face with his own soul. And yet the average man of to-day is desperately struggling through all his waking hours to steer safely clear of both. And of course he steers clear of religion, upon which we humans must depend for the development of our spiritual vision.

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V.

Who can tell what we have missed by our persistence in avoiding the stillness that can be felt? Who can conceive of the poverty of spirit into which we have fallen by reason of our cowardly habit of keeping out of sight of all the tragedies of birth and death, and all the terrible things that come between in the lives of one's fellowmen! Perhaps you have happened upon a poor, half-dead victim of a railroad wreck. His body was so mangled that as you knelt down by him you only thought of him as *it*.

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But the moment he opened his eyes and looked consciously into yours *it* disappeared. You could no longer think of *it* when you could see *him*. Nor could you think of him in that awful hour as only a piece of a man. Such a thought might come to you in the hours you spend on the street, as when you pass a poor fellow walking on his stumps, but in the luminous hour of a tragedy you know better. That poor mangled body was only a piece of a body, but you knew that the whole man was there. A large part of *it* was gone—there were neither arms nor legs; but there was no less of *him*.

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That vision of the whole man looking up at you from a poor mangled piece of a body thrilled you to the finger-tips. It was a vision of immortality. You had been thinking in a vague way that the flesh and the man are one; now it was as plain as the sun that the awful thing that had overtaken that poor body had not so much as touched the man, and you knew that it would never touch him. The flesh would cease to breathe, but the man would go on—like a bird escaped from its wrecked cage.

Such a vision that father had when he stood by his dying boy that golden day in September. It was as plain to

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him as the sun that death was only a physical phenomenon, and that the spirit—the real boy—still lived. And it was just as plain that he was not changed. In all essential things he was the same boy that he was before he ceased to breathe. Some things had ceased to exist—the beautiful body, the brain—that wonderful machine which the spirit used to communicate with his associates in this world—and all those thoughts, motives, and desires that had their origin in the physical—his instincts, his physical appetites and passions—but the real boy was there. Death had put an end to his pleasures,

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for pleasures depend upon the material things which we gather around us; but it had not destroyed his happiness, for happiness belongs to the spirit within us. It was impossible to conceive that death would bring any change in his character, or his spiritual affections and aspirations; how, for example, it could so change him that he could ever love his father less than he did before he went away.

And so, I am sure, you would feel to-day if you had been at your own boy's side in his last conscious moments. You would realize with a clearness which no scientific demonstration could

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give that no real disaster overtook him, that what we call death did not touch the real boy, but only released him from this narrow physical cell which we foolishly call life, but which is only the school time of life, and that he is still the same boy that he was when he was here, only wonderfully developed through the perfect Vision that came to him in the wider sphere. Would you recognize him? I can conceive of no possible reason why you should not. You would not find in him certain little things, certain charming ways which you have so often thought of since he went away, for these belonged to the

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flesh; but the real boy—the boy that was locked in his splendid frame—would be there. And the perfect eyes of the spirit, you may be sure, would not be less quick to recognize him there than the imperfect eyes of the flesh have been to recognize him here.

Once in a long while a vision of immortality comes to us in the midst of the slow tragedies of life. I once knew an invalid woman to waste away until it seemed to me her body had almost disappeared. And then, instead of a diminished creature, I saw a complete woman in all her glory. She was all spirit—a wonderful spirit—and the

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passing of her flesh meant no more than the removal of an outer garment. Can you imagine anybody questioning immortality in such a presence? Can you imagine that she questioned it? By the way, did you ever know any one who was dying to question it? Did you ever know a dying man to fear annihilation? I have known men in their last moments to be afraid of what was in the Beyond, but I have never known one to be afraid that there was no Beyond. . . .

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VI

Immortality, let me repeat, is a matter of consciousness. One cannot argue one's self into it: one must come up against it. It is not my privilege to know your religious beliefs, and I do not know how you feel about this matter; but will you permit me to say that life has few intimations of immortality for one who has never become conscious of the Infinite? May I go further and say that if one would become really conscious of his own immortality he must become conscious of the Infinite? If human history has settled anything

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at all it is that a man's consciousness of immortality is bound up with his consciousness of God, and that if he becomes conscious of God, he inevitably becomes conscious of his own immortality. The way to a satisfying faith in immortality is the way that leads to the eternal Father. And that way, we Christians believe, is Christ. Not a man named Jesus who lived a great while ago, but a risen, present Christ. It is the risen Christ who leads us to the Father and makes us conscious at once of the eternal Father and the immortality of His own children.

This too is a matter of consciousness

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rather than argument. The evidences of the resurrection of Christ—wonderful as they are, do not alone satisfy us. Not even a scientific demonstration of His resurrection would satisfy us. It might answer for to-day, but before we went to sleep at night it would occur to us that many things which were scientifically demonstrated a little while ago are being scientifically disproved to-day, and that no doubt many of the things that science has proved to-day will be disproved to-morrow, and our satisfaction would vanish like a bird out of the window. How many scientifically demonstrated facts are there upon

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which you can place your finger and say with absolute certainty, This is settled forever? No: we want something better than a scientific demonstration. We want to be as sure of a risen Christ as we are of our mother's love; and no scientific demonstration ever made a man sure of his mother's love.

No amount of evidence can satisfy us. It is something of course to know the facts which in the opinion of many of the world's greatest scholars make the resurrection of Jesus the best attested fact of history.

It is something to know that ever since the day the followers of Jesus be-

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gan to preach His resurrection, thousands of men and women, trusting in Him as a living Saviour actually present with them and imparting His strength to them, have walked straight up to death without fear and with songs of victory upon their lips.

It is something to know that since that day millions, trusting in the power of a risen, present Saviour, have been raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness—something that has never been done by human power since the world began.

It is something to know that since that day millions, when overwhelmed

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by the storms of life, have looked to Him as a living, present Saviour, and have received according to their needs, peace, consolation, inspiration, power—all of a kind passing understanding and beyond the power of the world to bestow.

It is something to know that since that day, wherever men and women have been found who believed with all their hearts in a living, present Saviour, there has been found moral and spiritual light and life; elsewhere—where He is not known and trusted—men and women are groping in moral and spiritual darkness.

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These are wonderful evidences of a risen, present Christ, and they appeal with wonderful force to our minds; but they do not satisfy us. They may satisfy our minds, but they cannot satisfy our hearts.

What will satisfy our hearts?

Let us face the truth: We shall never be satisfied deep down in our hearts that Jesus is risen from the dead until we meet the risen Jesus Himself—that is, until we *realize* Him—until we become conscious of Him as a living, present Saviour. We must go down on our knees before Him. We must surrender ourselves absolutely to Him.

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We must open our hearts wide to Him. We must speak to Him as we would speak to a friend face to face. We must keep in His footsteps and we must keep on speaking to Him. One day—perhaps this very day—while thus speaking to Him, He will become as real to us as He was to the disciples in Galilee. And then we shall be satisfied. Then we shall not trouble ourselves about the evidences of the Resurrection.

And then we shall not trouble ourselves about our immortality. . . .

VII

I have said that what we call life is only the school time of life. A youthful age always enormously exaggerates the present, and by all tokens this is a youthful age. We have been thinking and planning for the little time we are to spend here as if it were eternity. But it is all an illusion, and one seldom passes the meridian of life before he finds it out. This thin segment which we persist in calling life is only our school time. We are here for our education; for study; for long, weary hours of study—grinding study; study

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when our backs ache and our eyes hurt us so we can hardly see the page before us for our tears. Look at it from any point of view you may, and you will not make anything else out of it. We are here to be made into men—worth while men; men for eternal life. And there is no way to make a man but by hard grinding and discipline. God might have made things different if He had only intended us for tin soldiers. But I am glad that He did not intend us for tin soldiers. I am glad that He made us of the stuff that must go to school. And this is our school time. There are joyful recesses thrown in here and there

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in the early years, I admit, but it's school time all the same. One day, I am sure, you will not be sorry that your boy's school-days ended before he came to the harder years—to the long, weary terms in which the recesses are so few and far between and so short that the tired pupils don't know what to do with them, but only sit round and wait for the call to books again.

Perhaps you will even envy him for getting out of school ahead of his father!

And can you not already find something for your heart in the thought of the things that your boy gave his life for?—his home, his country, his race,

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the brotherhood of mankind, the Lord his God?—for liberty, justice, and truth?—for the safety of the world?—for the safety of all the precious things that make the world worth while?

Can you not find something in the thought that your boy bore away with him the highest honours from the School of Sacrifice?

Is it a little thing to be the father of a boy whose name has been placed upon the honour roll of those who refused to save their lives, and thereby proved the truth of the Master's word, "He that loseth his life shall save it"?

Is it a little thing to know that your

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boy, so far from being dismissed from service by cruel Fate, was only transferred to the more immediate command of One who, while here among us, displayed a peculiar affection for young men, whose most intimate companion was a young man, and who as a young man laid down His life for the world? . . .

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VIII

At the beginning of this letter I intimated that you are not alone in your sorrow. I am aware that this may not accord with your conscious experience. Very likely in that awful moment, and many times since then, you have had a sensation of loneliness more poignant than you ever suffered before. You felt as completely isolated as a castaway on a barren island. But that too is one of life's illusions. There is no real isolation in sorrow. How often in a time of anguish I have lifted my head

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to find myself surrounded in spirit with fellow sufferers! The School of Sorrow has been very full of late and many of us have been studying the same lesson together with you. And to many has come in a blinding flash, as it came to you, the meaning of those awful words, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

And that is not all. The moment you bared your bosom to the sword you turned from the lonely road into a path that has never been deserted. Down that path walked the father of Isaac. Down that path walked the mother of Jesus. Down that path to-day walk in

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silent fellowship an endless procession of kindred suffering spirits.

Nor is that all. May we not hope—may we not believe that with every suffering father who has bared his bosom bravely—as bravely as your boy bared his—walks the very first Father that ever gave His Son for a stricken world? . . .

May the kind Father who gave His only Son for us, and who by that act entered into fellowship with the great brotherhood of fathers who have lost a boy, be very gracious to you and to those who are bowed with you.

Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am there ye may be also.

—*The Master.*

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