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# PONDER THE 'AFTERWARD'!

By A. C. ROSE

This great word with a wealth of variation, sounds through the pages of Scripture, like organ music played by a master hand in some old Cathedral, carrying the listener away in spirit, until he stands within the everlasting gates and all desire is satisfied.

'Afterward' is a word peculiarly prophetic. It was used by the prophets frequently in one form or another, in warning of the inevitable wages of sin, or in assurance of the onward march of the purposes of God. It has ever been the word of the 'patience of the saints,' rich in faith and hope and love. It sustained the martyrs in their fiery trial, blunting the edge of pain and robbing the grave of its darkness. It filled the soul of the imprisoned Apostle with glory when the earthly shadows of age, loneliness and disloyalty overshadowed his horizon. Evangelists have strengthened their souls with it when all their toil seemed to be in vain; parents have comforted themselves with it, when high hopes for their children were brought down in ruin. AFTERWARD!

It is the psalm sung by the ploughshare, shearing its way through stubble and weed and stony ground, the prelude to the reapers' song. The deeper the furrow the richer the yield. No ploughshare no sickle. Those long furrows are the earnest of the hundredfold harvest. 'Afterward' is a divine word; the man who can use it skilfully, shares with the living God the faculty of calling the things that are not as though they were. It holds time at arms' length that it may embrace eternity. It breaks into the noise of daily battle with assurance of victory, the echo of all the trumpets sounding on the other side of the flood.

It was the gleam in Abraham's horror of great darkness when told that his seed should endure long bondage in a strange land: 'AFTERWARD shall they come out with great substance' (Gen. 15: 14). It was Job's solace when crushed by friend and enemy, and apparently forsaken by God. It was the light in Joseph's dungeon when forgotten by his powerful friend the butler. Being interpreted in sacred poetry it is:

'Weeping that may endure for a night,  
But joy cometh in the morning.'

It was an early note in the Isaian burden of the final triumph of righteousness. 'AFTERWARD thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city' (Isaiah 1:26). It was supremely

the word of the Son of God. 'Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross. . . .' At the end of those forty days of fierce temptation we read, 'He was AFTERWARD an hungred' (Matt. 4:24). He used it to illustrate the grace of repentance in time, and the gloom of eternal judgment. When Peter was insistent of his ability to go with his Master to the bitter end, he heard: 'Thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me AFTERWARDS' (John 13:36). It is the word of resurrection, rebuking unbelief. 'AFTERWARDS He appeared unto the eleven and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark 16:14). It is the word of the blessed hope of the glorious appearing. 'Christ the Firstfruits, AFTERWARD they that are Christ's at His coming' (1 Cor. 15:23). It is the word of the little while of Christian discipleship. 'No discipline for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless AFTERWARD it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby' (Heb. 12:11).

### The Glory of the Afterward

Here is the clue to the maze of Hosea: 'AFTERWARD shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God and David their king' (Hos. 3:5). Chapter after chapter begins with graphic demonstrations of Israel's abominable state. Chapter after chapter ends upon a note of hope. Man's day is seen totally dark with sin; night reigns, but the morning is sure, so that the eye of faith is presently dazzled with the last glowing promises, heralding the flight of all the shadows and the dawn of the dayspring from on high, as so graphically described in chapters 13 and 14.

Seven glorious promises make up this spectrum of grace, seven words stamped with the hall mark of God, '*I will ransom them from the power of the grave*' (13:14). The dreadful afterward of a hard-earned lost eternity should be frustrated by a ransom price which only Eternal Love could pay. The Law must have all its demands met, either by the guilty or the Guiltless. THE GLORY OF THE AFTERWARD was that the perfect Lawgiver should also give perfect satisfaction for His broken law.

'*I will redeem them from death.*' Their earthly redemption had been from Egypt, the shadow of death, by a lamb; from its substance another Lamb was a necessity; another Passover Feast must be celebrated on the evening before the day when death should die.

'*O death, I will be thy plagues.*' The last enemy is addressed

as the King of Terrors. He who had plagued the sons of Adam since that fatal day in the Garden should be plagued without mercy by the Messenger of the Most High. Receiving one more Victim, lo! it was the Victor. Eternal life had broken into death to break the ancient chains and smash the bars and set the captives free.

'*O grave, I will be thy destruction.*' What hopes and loves and glories had been buried there. But like some wild beast with insatiable appetite, whose ravages none could stay, against whose armour all weapons were powerless, he is doomed. The Destroyer is due for destruction. A Champion was afoot who would not only make an end of tyranny, but would bring in its place, the law of liberty.

'*I will heal their backslidings*' (14:4 f.). The desire to go backwards should be converted, so that its effect should be at least equal but opposite. The tendency to slide should become an urge to climb.

'*I will love them freely.*' The barriers must all go down before the approach of 'this tremendous Lover.' The vehement flame should consume every hindrance and even the memory of the hateful past be blotted out.

'*I will be as the dew unto Israel.*' As in Eden the gentle dew went up giving to all that beauty, its freshness and continuance, so should it be with Israel; so is it now with the 'Israel of God,' the church of His love.

This seventh promise is like a seven faceted jewel for the dew of heaven is upon the lily crown of purity; there are the roots of the divinely planted tree, anchored to the everlasting hills, firm as the cedars of Lebanon; it is as fruitful as an olive tree with wide spreading branches; fragrant as the wine of Lebanon; revived as the cornfield under quickening showers; blossoming as the vine and steadfast as the storm defying cypress.

#### My 'Afterward'!

'But as for me my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish. . . . So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee, Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel and *afterward* receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.'