

They Shall Walk and not Faint

by Fanning Yater Tant

It was Isaiah who wrote, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." (Isa. 40:31.)

There are only a few moments of high drama in life; most of it is commonplace and ordinary. And the real test of the Christian comes not in the moments of high drama, but in the everyday, often monotonous and dreary round of ever recurring chores and responsibilities. Probably most of those who read this paper would, under the right circumstances, be willing to suffer martyrdom rather than surrender the Christian's hope and heritage. We can, indeed "mount up with wings as eagles," under great excitement and tension; we can "run, and not be weary," for a short space of time...

But to walk, day after day after day; to live in some desolate and hopeless environment, bereft of Christian friends and associates; to perform the drudgery, the same unbroken sequence of tired days and weary nights, the same melancholy schedule of activities — how this can erode the soul and deaden the senses! It was this terrible monotony of life which had brutalized the real spirit of man in Millet's famous painting, and which caused Edwin Markham to write of that peasant character:

"Bowed upon the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world."

The apostle Paul felt no such weariness of life. He could write to the Corinthians, "but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The child of God lives in eternity — now. He is daily in the company of the great saints of all ages. His earthly tasks are unimportant, one way or the other, in themselves; they are given worth only as they are done in the service of God. All of us are familiar with the story of the two brick-masons who were asked by a passerby what they were doing. Said one, "I'm laying bricks;" but the other said, "I'm building a cathedral to the glory of God."

"How can you live in Goshen? Said a friend from afar.
This is a wretched little place Where people talk about tawdry things
And plant cabbages in the moonlight... But I do not live in Goshen, I answered.

I live in Greece Where Plato taught and Phidias carved.
I live in Rome Where Cicero penned immortal lines

And Michelangelo dreamed things of beauty.

Do not think my world is small Because you find me in a little village.
I have my books, my pictures, my dreams, Enchantments that transcend Time and Space.
I do not live in Goshen at all, I live in an unbounded universe
With the great souls of all the ages For my companions."

Those lines from "Goshen" by Edgar Frank, give the key to great living. Every one of us lives in two worlds, one outer, one inner. We cannot control the outward world. It has fires and floods, earthquakes, and wars, and famine. But the inner world, the world of the spirit, is within the reach of every man. We may walk with Moses and Abraham. We may walk the dusty, rocky hills of Judea, or go through the flower strewn fields of Galilee with Jesus Christ as our guide and companion. In all that we do, if we are serving Christ, there is beauty and glory.

The quotation from Isaiah is climactic and not anti-climactic in its description of those who "wait eagles; and to walk and not faint is even more difficult than to run and not be weary. For the mounting up, and even the running, call for quick, short bursts of energy; but the walking — walking — walking — through long and lonely days, through hours of discouragement and despair, often in pain and suffering, this is that which tries a man's soul. And only those who "wait upon the Lord" can measure up to what is required.

From the prison cell in Rome (or perhaps from his own hired dwelling while under house arrest) Paul wrote his "thank you note" to the saints at Philippi. It is perhaps the most joyous book in the entire New Testament. The key word in it is the word "joy" or "rejoice." Out of one of the darkest and bleakest hours of his life this beautiful short epistle bursts forth like the song of a meadowlark whose small heart is about to break with the sheer joy of living. It is contagious. No one can truly read this epistle without in some way catching Paul's spirit of courage and optimism. He is a happy man!

Many of you who read these lines will remember C. R. Nichol. We ran across a story about him some years ago which may be apocryphal but which is quite in character for him, and which is worth re-telling. One day in his old age he was in a certain town holding a meeting, and chanced to be walking the few blocks from his hotel to the church building for the morning service. He was dressed immaculately (as usual) with the ever present rose bud pinned to his lapel. As he walked with head thrown back and jaunty stride, he was softly whistling a lilting happy tune. One of the brethren stopped him on the street, and said, "Brother Nichol, you look like you own the does!"

The Christian never forgets that. He is the child of a King! his father owns the world! No wonder he can walk, and not faint; no wonder he can write, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly;" no wonder he can say, "We've had a good life; and when the time comes, we are ready to go." This is not the exulting cry of a martyr about to be burned at the stake; this is not spoken in the high drama of Caesar's court as multitudes look on. This is the word of a humble servant of Christ. He is not facing a ravenous lion in the Roman arena

amid the screaming excitement of a vast throng. Rather, in the very ordinary affairs of life, perhaps in sickness, or loneliness, or isolation from loved ones, he is aware of his eternal destiny. The world may look upon his life as the very epitome of trivial and commonplace drudgery; but he remembers the word of his Master, "whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant." And he is neither ashamed nor unwilling to have his lot cast in the lowliest and most humble occupations of earth if only therein he can serve his Master.

It was the blind Milton who wrote:

"When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's works or his own gifts.
Who best Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.
His state is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."