

# The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

John Angell James



Soli Deo Gloria Publications  
*. . . for instruction in righteousness . . .*

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## P R E F A C E.

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ONE of the errands on which the Son of GOD came from heaven to earth, was to bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn : and during his sojourn upon earth, the tenderest sympathy was one of the virtues which adorned that holy nature, in which dwelt, as in its temple, “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

Like their Divine Master, the ministers of the gospel ought to be sons of consolation, and to perform the functions of a comforter, as well as those of an instructor : for if pure and undefiled religion, as regards the professors of christianity, consists, in part, of visiting the widow and fatherless in their affliction, how much more incumbent is it on its teachers, to cherish and to manifest the same tenderness of spirit towards this deeply suffering portion of the human family. A group of children gathered round a widowed mother, and sobbing out their sorrows, as she repeats to them, amidst many tears, their father’s loved and honoured name, is one of those pictures of woe, on which few can look with an unmoistened eye.

Is it not strange, then, that with claims upon our sympathy, so strong and so generally acknowledged,

such mourners should have engaged no pious author to produce a separate treatise for their relief? That while the department of hortatory theology is so rich in its stores of consolation for the afflicted in general, the *widow* should have had no tribute of sympathy specially prepared to meet *her* sad case? At least I know of none. Popular treatises of inestimable value, such as Cecil's "Friendly Visit to the House of Mourning;" Grosvenor's "Mourner Comforted;" and Hill's "Faith's estimate of Afflictive Dispensations," published by the Religious Tract Society, under the title "It is Well;" are known by thousands to their consolation, and are, of course, as appropriate to the widow as to any other of the varieties of mourners—but *she* needs a special message of comfort from her Lord; a voice which speaks to her case alone; a strain of consolation which, in its descriptions and condolence, is appropriate, and exclusively so, to her. As it is the peculiarity of our sorrows which often gives them their depth and pungency, so it is the peculiarity of sympathy also which gives to this cordial for a fainting spirit, its balmy and reviving power. Affliction, like bodily disease, has numerous varieties; and, comfort, like medicine, derives its efficacy from its suitableness to the case.

In Dr. ADAM THOMPSON'S "Consolations for Christian Mourners," there are two excellent sermons addressed to widows; but these constitute no exception to the statement, that there is no separate work for

such mourners. May the present attempt, specially addressed to them, by one who knows, he trusts, by experience, the value of the considerations he submits to others; by one who has been called in time past to weep, and is now trembling and weeping again, be blessed by the GOD of all consolation, for their comfort.

The following work is written with great simplicity, in sentiment and style: for it would be a mockery of woe to approach it with far fetched subjects; recondite discussion; cold logic; or artificial rhetoric. The bruised heart loves the gentlest handling, and the troubled spirit is soothed with the simplest music. The soul has no inclination, at such times, and in such circumstances, for any thing but the "sincere milk of the word," leaving the strong meat for other and healthier seasons.

The volume is rather more expensively printed than on some accounts is desirable, but as it is to come into the hands of some whose eyes are dim, either with age or weeping, I thought it best to select a large type, and present a clear, uncrowded page.

J. A. J.

*Edgbaston, March 9th. 1841.*

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# FIRST PART.



APPROPRIATE SUGGESTIONS TO WIDOWS.





## CHAPTER I.

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### SYMPATHY.

A WIDOW! What a desolate name! If there be one amidst the crowd of mourners that tread the vale of tears, who above all others, claims our sympathy, and receives it, it is you who have laid down the endearing appellation of Wife, to take up that of Widow. It would be a mockery of your woe to say, "Woman, why weepest thou?" You *may* weep, you must, you ought. You are placed by Providence in the region of sorrow, and tears befit your condition. Let them flow, and mine shall flow with them, for if it be ever our duty to weep with those that weep, it is when the Widow is before us. The death-bed scene is still fresh in your recollection; the parting look, the last embrace are still present to your imagination. And oh! the sense of loss that

presses like a dead weight upon your spirit, and converts this whole busy world around you, into one vast wilderness. You have my tenderest condolence. The closest tie which bound you to earth has been severed. It seems to you as if there were nothing left for you to do upon earth but to weep. The husband's much loved image, if it hang not upon the wall, silent and motionless, is drawn upon the heart, for the imagination to gaze upon, and to remind you of your desolation. He whose absence but for a week or a day created an uneasiness which nothing could relieve but his return, is gone not for a day, or a week, or a year, but for ever. He is never to come back, to gladden the heart of his wife, and to bless his household.

It has been finely observed "that the loss of a friend, (and much more the loss of a husband,) upon whom the heart was fixed, to whom every wish and endearment tended, is a state of dreary desolation, on which the mind looks abroad impatient of itself, and finds nothing but emptiness and horror. The blameless life, the artless tenderness, the pious simplicity, the

modest resignation, the patient sickness, and the quiet death, are remembered only to add value to the loss, to aggravate regret for what cannot be amended, to deepen sorrow for what cannot be recalled. Other evils, fortitude may repel, or hope may mitigate, but irreparable privation leaves nothing to exercise resolution, or flatter expectation. The dead cannot return, and nothing is left us here but languishment and grief.”\*

But it is not merely the loss of such a friend you have to mourn, but probably the means of your comfortable sustenance. Your husband was your provider, and the supporter of your babes. When he died all your prospects faded. The sun of your prosperity set upon his grave. Even when an ample fortune is left, it is a poor substitute for that friend whose decease covered the earth with sackcloth, and spread a pall over every terrestrial scene; but what an aggravation of woe, what a dreariness is added to desolation, when the spectres of poverty and

\* Dr. THOMSON'S *Consolations for Mourners*, p. 119.

want, or even the dark portents of care and privation, rise from a husband's grave. Perhaps even his labour, and skill, and patient perseverance, were but just sufficient to support the family; and what is the widow, unused, perhaps, to business, and untrained to hardship, to do alone? "It is," says Mr. BRUCE, "the climax of human sorrow, when the wife of youth is left to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband at the time when his well-formed schemes were advancing to maturity; so that, in addition to the care of providing for her rising offspring, some of whom never learned to lisp the name of father, she has to struggle with difficulties, which his sagacity and perseverance might have overcome."

Nor is it only the want of support, afflicted woman, you dread for yourself and your children, but the want of protection. You have seen enough of the world to know, how selfishness prevails over benevolence, and how little disinterestedness is to be expected from that multitude, in which are to be found so many who oppress the weak, and so many more

that neglect the friendless. A thousand fears of insult and injuries rise in your perturbed mind, and you feel as if the tear of the widow, and the cry of the fatherless, will have little power to interest the busy, and to melt the iron heart of the unjust. Already, perhaps, you think you have received significant hints, not to be mistaken, even from the friends of your husband, that your expectations, even of counsel and advice, much more of other kinds of assistance, must be very limited. It is possible, however, that sorrow, solitude, and dependance, may have produced a sensitiveness on this subject, which makes you more suspicious and mistrustful, than you have need to be, and that after all, there is a larger portion of sympathy and generous intention, than you may be led to suppose.

To the widow of the departed christian, there is another ingredient in the cup of her sorrow, another aggravation of the loss she has sustained, and that is, she is deprived of her own spiritual comforter and companion ; and if she be a mother, of the religious instructor and

guide of her children. He that was at once the king, the prophet, and the priest of the little domestic community, is removed. How tenderly did he solve her doubts, relieve her perplexities, and comfort her in her sorrows. How sweet was it to take counsel with him on the things of another world, and to walk to the house of God in company. What sabbaths they spent, and what sacramental seasons they enjoyed together. And then his nightly and morning sacrifice at the domestic altar; his fervent prayers, and his pious breathings for his family: but that tongue is now silent in the grave; those holy hands are now no more lifted up to bless the household; that mild sceptre of paternal rule has dropped. Even *he*, good man, felt a dread and a trembling that sometimes almost overcame his faith and trust, as he lay upon his death bed, and anticipated the hour when he should leave his children amidst the snares and temptations of this dangerous world. I do not wonder that you, his sad survivor, should feel your great responsibility, as you look round on the be-

reaved circle, and remember that these young immortals are left to your sole guidance and guardianship. Often you say, as the tears roll down your cheeks, "It is not merely, nor chiefly, the care of their bodies, nor the culture of their minds, that makes me feel my sad privation, but the interests of their souls. I could eat my bread, if it were *only* bread, and drink my cup of cold water, and deal out bread and water to *them* with tolerable composure, if I could well discharge the duty I owe to their souls, and see them following their sainted parent to the skies : but oh ! the thought that my boys have lost a father to guide them along the slippery paths of youth, and form their character for time and eternity too ; and that at a season when his instructive example and advice were most needed ; this is the wormwood and gall of a widow's cup."

Afflicted woman, if sympathy be a balm for the wounds of your lacerated heart, you have it. Bad as human nature is, it is not so entirely bereft of the whatsoever things are lovely, as not to condole with *you*. It is not yours to

reproach, in the language of holy writ, the insensibility of a whole generation, and say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by: come see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me." This little volume, at any rate, comes to you as a comforter and a counsellor. One individual has thought upon you; and as a minister of him, who wept at the grave of LAZARUS, and who restored to the widow of Nain, her son, when she was following him with a heart half broken to the grave, he comes with more than human sympathy, and earthly consolation. It is balm from heaven he brings, and a divine medicine for your sick and sorrowful heart. It is christianity, in the person of one of its ministers that presents the cup of peace. O turn not away from it, nor refuse to be comforted. Hush then, the clamour of tumultuous thoughts; calm the perturbations of your troubled spirit; for the voice of the Comforter can be heard only in the silence of submission. Yes, even *your* grief is susceptible of alleviation. I cannot break open the tomb to undo the work of death, and



re-animate and restore the dust which lies sleeping there : I cannot replace by your side the dear companion that has been torn from it : but I can suggest topics, which, if you can sufficiently controul your feelings to ponder them, are of such a nature, so soothing and sustaining, that they will pluck the sting from your affliction, and enable you by GOD's grace, to bear up with fortitude under a load, which would otherwise crush you to the earth. I am anxious at once to possess you with the idea, that you ought not to be, and need not be, inconsolable. Tenderly as I feel for you, and anxious as I am not to handle roughly the wounds which have been inflicted upon your peace, still I must remind you, that you are not authorised to indulge yourself in an unlimited liberty of grief ; nor to justify such an excess, by affirming that you do well to be sorrowful even unto death. I beseech you then to obtain leave of your agitated heart, to listen to the gracious words of Him of whom it is so beautifully said, " He comforteth those that are cast down." In his name I speak to you ; and I speak of that which I have tasted,

and felt of the Word of God. I too have been afflicted like yourself, and have known, not by observation merely, but by experience, what a desolation and blank one single death can make in the garden of earthly joys : and where in that hour of dreariness and woe, the lonely spirit may find a refuge and a home.