

# Feathers for Arrows



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Illustrations for Preachers and Teachers

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## PREFACE.

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**T**HERE is no necessity in these times to advocate the free use of similitudes in public teaching. Far more needful is it to assist our brethren to find a supply of these indispensable aids to understanding. To some it is difficult to create a comparison, although they know how to use it with effect when it is once suggested to them ; and the most fertile minds are frequently stimulated to further production by reading the thoughts of others. It is not, therefore, I hope, an impertinence on my part to present to the Christian public a bundle of illustrations original and collected. My aim has not been to amuse the reader, but to furnish FEATHERS FOR ARROWS for the servants of Christ Jesus.

Whenever I have been permitted sufficient respite from my ministerial duties to enjoy a lengthened tour, or even a short excursion, I have been in the habit of carrying with me a small *Note Book*, in which I have jotted down any illustrations which have occurred to me by the way. My recreations have been all the more pleasant because I have made them subservient to my life-work. The *Note Book* has been useful in my travels as a mental purse. If not fixed upon paper, ideas are apt to vanish with the occasion which suggested them. A word or two will suffice to bring an incident or train of thought to remembrance ; and therefore, it would be inexcusable in a minister, who needs so much, not to preserve all that comes in his way.

From the pencil-marks of the pocket-book my notes have been enlarged into more permanent manuscript, and have been of great service to me. Out of hundreds of metaphors and anecdotes thus collected, I have used the main body in my constant sermonisings; but as enough remained unused to make me feel competently rich in illustrations, I determined to offer a portion of my hoard to my fellow workers, feeling the less difficulty in so doing because the ingatherings of continual observation more than replace the material expended in this distribution. Moreover, indebted as every preacher must be to the illustrations of others, it is but just, that, if he be able, he should make some return: in that spirit my contribution is hereby offered.

To the nucleus formed by cullings from my *Note Book*, my readings, in an attempt to expound the Psalms,\* have enabled me to add many quaint comparisons and ancient stories, which from their very age are probably newer than the latest novelties to modern readers. A few clippings from favourite writers, such as James Hamilton and William Arnot have been thrown in almost of necessity, for one feels a sort of obligation, by the exhibition of golden nuggets, to give note to others of the mines where treasure lies piled up in glittering heaps. To make the gathering still more varied, scraps from newspapers and magazines are interspersed, — fragments preserved in such odd times and circumstances, that out of what basket they first fell I cannot say, whether they are new or old I know not; I can only say that they were new to me. The whole collection is now presented to teachers and preachers as a sincere offering of hearty "brother-help." If there be here a single illustration which shall assist one of my Master's servants in his efforts to impart truth, I shall be greatly gratified. Desiring to do this and every other word and deed, "in the name of the Lord

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\* "The Treasury of David." By C. H. SPURGEON. Vol. 1. Psalm I. to XXVI. London: Passmore and Alabaster, 18, Paternoster Row. Price 8s.

Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him," I prepared these figures and metaphors, that they may serve as *feathers for arrows*—arrows of gospel truth which I pray may be made sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies.

According to D'Israeli's canon, "a preface being the entrance to a book, should invite by its beauty," but he might have equally well remarked that a preface being merely a porch, no one ought to be long detained in it. Believing in this last rule, and begging the reader's lenient criticism, I invite him to such entertainment as this little volume may afford : being myself,

His willing servant,

CLAPHAM,  
*February, 1870.*

*C. H. Spurgeon*









# MY NOTE BOOK.

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## **ABASEMENT—To be rejoiced in.**

WHEN Latimer resigned his bishopric, Foxe tells us that as he put off his rochet from his shoulders he gave a skip on the floor for joy, "feeling his shoulders so light at being discharged of such a burden." To be relieved of our wealth or high position is to be unloaded of weighty responsibilities, and should not cause us to fret, but rather to rejoice as those who are lightened of a great load. If we cease from office in the church, or from public honours, or from power of any sort, we may be consoled by the thought that there is just so much the less for us to answer for at the great audit, when we must give an account of our stewardship.

## **ABSENCE FROM WEEK-NIGHT SERVICES.**

"PRAYER-MEETING and lecture as usual on Wednesday evening, in the lecture-room. Dear brethren, I urge you all to attend the weekly meetings. 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.'" Some of the "dear brethren" departed themselves in this way: Brother A. *thought it looked like rain*, and concluded that his family, including himself of course, had better remain at home. On Thursday evening it was raining very hard, and the same brother hired a carriage,

and took his whole family to the Academy of Music, to hear M. Agassiz lecture on the "Intelligence of the Lobster." Brother B. *thought he was too tired to go*, so he stayed at home and *worked* at the sledge he had promised to make for Billy. Sister C. *thought the pavements were too slippery*. It would be very dangerous for her to venture out. I saw her next morning, going down street to get her old bonnet "done up." She had an old pair of stockings drawn over her shoes. Three-fourths of the members stayed at home. God was at the prayer-meeting. The pastor was there, and God blessed them. The persons who stayed at home were each represented by a vacant seat. God don't bless empty seats.—*United Presbyterian.*

#### **ACCESS.**

THERE are many locks in my house and all with different keys, but I have one master-key which opens all. So the Lord has many treasures and secrets all shut up from carnal minds with locks which they cannot open; but he who walks in fellowship with Jesus possesses the master-key which will admit him to all the blessings of the covenant; yea, to the very heart of God. Through the Wellbeloved we have access to God, to heaven, to every secret of the Lord.

#### **ACTIVITY—a Help to Courage.**

COURAGE maintains itself by its ardent action, as some birds rest on the wing. There is an energy about agility that will often give a man a fortitude which otherwise he might not have possessed. We can picture the gallant regiment at Balaclava riding into the valley of death at a dashing gallop, but we could scarcely imagine their marching slowly up to the guns, coolly calculating all the deadly odds of the adventure. There is much in our obeying as our Lord did, "straightway." When the Lord gives his servants grace to follow out their convictions as soon as they feel them, then they act courageously.

First thoughts are best in the service of God, they are like Gideon's men that lapped. Second thoughts come up timorously and limpingly, and incite us to make provision for the flesh, they are like those men whom Gideon discarded because they went down on their knees to drink, they took things too leisurely to be fit for the Lord's battles.

**ADVENT—Looking for the.**

I WAS told of a poor peasant on the Welsh mountains who, month after month, year after year, through a long period of declining life, was used every morning, as soon as he awoke, to open his casement window, towards the east, and look out to see if Jesus Christ was coming. He was no calculator, or he need not have looked so long; he was no student of prophecy, or he need not have looked at all; he was ready, or he would not have been in so much haste; he was willing, or he would rather have looked another way; he loved, or it would not have been the first thought of the morning. His Master did not come, but a messenger did, to fetch the ready one home. The same preparation sufficed for both, the longing soul was satisfied with either. Often when, in the morning, the child of God awakes, weary and encumbered with the flesh, perhaps from troubled dreams, perhaps with troubled thoughts, his Father's secret comes presently across him, he looks up, if not out, to feel, if not to see, the glories of that last morning when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall arise indestructible; no weary limbs to bear the spirit down; no feverish dreams to haunt the vision; no dark forecasting of the day's events, or returning memory of the griefs of yesterday.—*Fry*.

**AFFLICTION—Attendant upon Honour.**

IN the ancient times, a box on the ear given by a master to a slave meant liberty, little would the freedman care how hard was the blow. By a stroke from the sword the warrior was

knighted by his monarch, small matter was it to the new-made knight if the royal hand was heavy. When the Lord intends to lift his servants into a higher stage of spiritual life, he frequently sends them a severe trial; he makes his Jacobs to be prevailing princes, but he confers the honour after a night of wrestling, and accompanies it with a shrunken sinew. Be it so, who among us would wish to be deprived of the trials if they are the necessary attendants of spiritual advancement?

#### **AFFLICTION—Awakening Gratitude.**

AFFLICTIONS when sanctified make us grateful for mercies which aforesaid we treated with indifference. We sat for half-an-hour in a calf's shed the other day, quite grateful for the shelter from the driving rain, yet at no other time would we have entered such a hovel. Discontented persons need a course of the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, to cure them of the wretched habit of murmuring. Even things which we loathed before, we shall learn to prize when in troublous circumstances. We are no lovers of lizards, and yet at Pont St. Martin, in the Val D'Aosta, where the mosquitoes, flies, and insects of all sorts drove us nearly to distraction, we prized the little green fellows, and felt quite an attachment to them as they darted out their tongues and devoured our worrying enemies. Sweet are the uses of adversity, and this among them—that it brings into proper estimation mercies aforesaid lightly esteemed.

#### **AFFLICTION—Endears the Promises.**

WE never prize the precious words of promise till we are placed in conditions in which their suitability and sweetness are manifested. We all of us value those golden words, "*When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee,*" but few if any of us have read them with the delight of the martyr Bilney, to whom this passage was a stay, while he was in prison awaiting his

execution at the stake. His Bible, still preserved in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, has the passage marked with a pen in the margin. Perhaps, if all were known, every promise in the Bible has borne a special message to some one saint, and so the whole volume might be scored in the margin with mementoes of Christian experience, every one appropriate to the very letter.

**AFFLICTION—Effects of, in different People.**

“HOW different are summer storms from winter ones! In winter they rush over the earth with their violence; and if any poor remnants of foliage or flowers have lingered behind, these are swept along at one gust. Nothing is left but desolation; and long after the rain has ceased, pools of water and mud bear tokens of what has been. But when the clouds have poured out their torrents in summer, when the winds have spent their fury, and the sun breaks forth again in glory, all things seem to rise with renewed loveliness from their refreshing bath. The flowers, glistening with rainbows, smell sweeter than before; the grass seems to have gained another brighter shade of green; and the young plants which had hardly come into sight, have taken their place among their fellows in the borders, so quickly have they sprung among the showers. The air, too, which may previously have been oppressive, is become clear, and soft, and fresh. Such, too, is the difference when the storms of affliction fall on hearts unrenewed by Christian faith, and on those who abide in Christ. In the former they bring out the dreariness and desolation which may before have been unapparent. The gloom is not relieved by the prospect of any cheering ray to follow it; of any flowers or fruits to show its beneficence. But in the true Christian soul, ‘though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.’ A sweet smile of hope and love follows every tear; and tribulation itself is turned into the chief of blessings.”

**AFFLICTION—an Incentive to Zeal.**

THERE is an old story in the Greek annals of a soldier under Antigonus who had a disease about him, an extremely painful one, likely to bring him soon to the grave. Always first in the charge was this soldier, rushing into the hottest part of the fray, as the bravest of the brave. His pain prompted him to fight, that he might forget it ; and he feared not death, because he knew that in any case he had not long to live. Antigonus, who greatly admired the valour of his soldier, discovering his malady, had him cured by one of the most eminent physicians of the day ; but, alas ! from that moment the warrior was absent from the front of the battle. He now sought his ease ; for, as he remarked to his companions, he had something worth living for—health, home, family, and other comforts, and he would not risk his life now as aforetime. So, when our troubles are many we are often by grace made courageous in serving our God ; we feel that we have nothing to live for in this world, and we are driven, by hope of the world to come, to exhibit zeal, self-denial, and industry. But how often is it otherwise in better times ! for then the joys and pleasures of this world make it hard for us to remember the world to come, and we sink into inglorious ease.

**AFFLICTION—Increased with our Strength.**

“ I HAD,” said Latimer, describing the way in which his father trained him as a yeoman’s son, “ my bows bought me according to my age and strength ; as I increased in them so my bows were made bigger and bigger.” Thus boys grew into cross-bowmen, and by a similar increase in the force of their trials, Christians become veterans in the Lord’s host. The affliction which is suitable for a babe in grace would little serve the young man, and even the well-developed man needs severer trials as his strength increases. God, like a wise father, trains us wisely, and as we are able to bear it he makes our service and our suffering more arduous. As boys rejoice to be treated

like men, so will we rejoice in our greater tribulations, for here is man's work for us, and by God's help we will not flinch from doing it.

**AFFLICTION—Making us long for Heaven.**

WE had traversed the Great Aletsch Glacier, and were very hungry when we reached the mountain tarn half-way between the Bel Alp and the hotel at the foot of the *Æggischorn*; there a peasant undertook to descend the mountain, and bring us bread and milk. It was a very *Marah* to us when he brought us back milk too sour for us to drink, and bread black as a coal, too hard to bite, and sour as the curds. What then? Why, we longed the more eagerly to reach the hotel towards which we were travelling. We mounted our horses, and made no more halts till we reached the hospitable table where our hunger was abundantly satisfied. Thus our disappointments on the road to heaven whet our appetites for the better country, and quicken the pace of our pilgrimage to the celestial city.

**AFFLICTION—Noble Piety nourished amid.**

“THE pine, placed nearly always among scenes disordered and desolate, brings into them all possible elements of order and precision. Lowland trees may lean to this side and that, though it is but a meadow breeze that bends them, or a bank of cowslips from which their trunks lean aslope. But let storm and avalanche do their worst, and let the pine find only a ledge of vertical precipice to cling to, it will nevertheless grow straight. Thrust a rod from its last shoot down the stem, it shall point to the centre of the earth as long as the tree lives.” Amid the sternest trials the most upright Christians are usually reared. The divine life within them so triumphs over every difficulty as to render the men, above all others, true and exact. What a noble spectacle is a man whom nothing can warp, a firm, decided servant of God, defying hurricanes of temptation!

**AFFLICTION—Overruled to promote Joy.**

OUR afflictions are like weights, and have a tendency to bow us to the dust, but there is a way of arranging weights by means of wheels and pulleys, so that they will even lift us up. Grace, by its matchless art, has often turned the heaviest of our trials into occasions for heavenly joy. "We glory in tribulations also." We gather honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

**AFFLICTION—Revealing Christians.**

WHEN the green leaves bedeck the trees and all is fair, one cannot readily find the birds' nests, but when the winter lays bare the trees, anyone, with half-an-eye, may see them. Thus amid the press of business and prosperity the Christian may scarcely be discerned, his hidden life is concealed amid the thick and throng of the things of earth ; but let affliction come, a general sickness, or severe losses in the family, and you shall see the Christian man plainly enough in the gracious patience by which he rises superior to trial. The sick bed reveals the man ; the burning house, the sinking ship, the panic on the exchange, all these make manifest the hidden ones. In many a true believer, true piety is like a drum which nobody hears of unless it be beaten.

**AFFLICTION—Right View of.**

OUR crosses are not made of iron, though painted sometimes with iron colours ; they are formed of nothing heavier than wood. Yet they are not made of pasteboard, and will never be light in themselves, though our Lord can lighten them by his presence. The Papists foolishly worship pieces of wood supposed to be parts of the true cross ; but he who has borne the really true cross, and known its sanctifying power, will value every sliver of it, counting his trials to be his treasures, his afflictions argosies of wealth, and his losses his best gains.