

THE QUIET HOUR

"Why The Thorns?"

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The other day we had a picnic. We went to a beautiful part of the countryside and rambled across the rocks and round the lake. How beautiful it was—the sunlight shimmering on the water, the profusion of flowers, reds, yellows & white, and the fish darting here and there in the cool green water. But it wasn't long before one member of our party had to sit down and take out a thorn which had pierced right through the sole of his shoe. Another member of the party found a thorny problem in another part of the anatomy when sitting down to eat lunch. Both unfortunates were treated to hilarious remarks! But it is when you get your nice new clothes torn by some thorny bush, or when you see an animal lame from some festering splinter in its foot that the question begins to be seriously asked "Why the thorns?". There are the other thorns in life, too, not physical thorns but metaphorical ones. These are the chance remarks or injustices that injure us. There are omissions by other people which rankle. There are our own faults and failings which continually trouble us. Why the thorns?

That we should ask such a question at all implies that we seek better things. If we ourselves could plan life, we could arrange for it to be without thorns. Absence of hurt, danger, irritants,—this would be part of our programme. But this is just what we can do! We can arrange for our contributions to the lives of others to be thornless. Some of us get so worked up about what we consider to be injustices that we want to plant thorns for those who offend us. To want a thornless world for ourselves, and yet to plant thornbushes for other people is a revelation of our own meanness.

Another way of looking at thorns is to accept them as part of life. This is not to say that we want them, or enjoy them, or encourage them, but that when we get pricked we are reminded that the unpleasant has to be suffered. And some people suffer far more than we do. To suffer a little discomfort ourselves makes us sit up (as did my picnic friend) and take action to ensure that we lessen the discomfort of some-one else.

I know a person who has suffered from life's thorns and whose gentle response to the irritants of life as these came was to say "Ah, yes. An excellent means of grace!" In other words he saw the thorn as a challenge to be met by greater self-control. He did not allow it to get into life and fester, but accepted it as an opportunity for developing patience.

Another friend of mine suffers in a way that shows great courage and spiritual resource. When others who suffer in the same way are brought into contact with him, they are strengthened, because he is there as one who suffers to comfort others who suffer. But, if it was not for his thorn, would there be any one around to give courage and comfort?

As and when thorns come in life, although we do not regard them as good things, is it not possible to make good come out of them; good for ourselves in matters of self-control, good for others in terms of considerate planning, or sympathy? As I see it we need God's help to put thorns to profitable use, but I believe God does give us that sort of help, if we really are prepared to receive it.

So "Why the thorns?" Probably we shall in this life never entirely comprehend the reason for the thorns. We have to follow humbly where we cannot fully understand. But we catch glimpses of the truth, and find that in the purpose of God the thorns of life are not merely suffered but are fashioned into a crown.