

The Ups and Downs of Life

F. B. Hole.

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The fear of change, which carries with it apprehension in regard to the future, is a great hindrance to a vast number of believers. We started our Christian career by facing the *sin* question, and finding a divinely-given solution of it in the gospel. This was followed by the uprising of the *self* question, and to this perhaps we have found an answer, so that we taste in some degree the sweets of victory over sin. There yet remains the *circumstances* question, and we most of us find it the most difficult problem of all.

The year 1915 has drawn to a close. It has been marked by changes greater in number and more sweeping in their effects than any which this generation has known. The year 1916 dawns, and the portents are dark; changes, more and deeper yet, seem to be indicated. How shall we face them? Let us do so with the remembrance that by these very changes God is giving us an education, the benefits of which we shall carry with us for all eternity.

Change has always been an essential part of the education of God's saints. The biographies of the Bible bear ample witness to this, but perhaps no one life exemplifies it more strikingly than that of Daniel. Let us consider his history for a few moments.

He began life in an *exalted* station. He was "of the king's seed, and of the princes . . . in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them...." He was, in short, of royal descent, and perfectly suited to his high position both physically and mentally.

Early in life, however, a blow descended which brought him down very *low*. Jerusalem fell, before the military prowess of Babylon. Zedekiah, its last king, the head of Daniel's house, was dethroned, and Daniel, though spared with other young princes in the general slaughter, found himself a captive in a foreign land.

Did he repine? Did he, assuming that "all was up," abandon himself to a life of as much ease and pleasure as was obtainable under the circumstances? By no means. The very opposite. It was just then that in the fear of God he made his immortal resolve "that he would not defile himself" by the smallest complicity with the idolatry which permeated the very atmosphere of Babylon, cost what it might. Morally and spiritually he was far greater when down than when up.

The very advance which he made during this time of adversity only paved the way, however, for another change. His thorough-going separation to God from evil led to his acquiring a very remarkable measure of power with God in prayer, and soon an occasion arose which put it to the proof. When the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar had a remarkable dream, forgot it, and then threatened to slay all the wise men of Babylon because they were unable both to recall the dream for him and then interpret it, Daniel and his companions besieged heaven in prayer until the thing was revealed to Daniel, and he was able so effectually to meet the demands of the enraged king that the latter not only fell before him, doing him homage, but confessed the supreme glory of his God, and ended by making him "a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon."

Thus at a single bound did Daniel go up in the world once more. He was not spoiled by this sudden wave of prosperity; this is made very evident by what we have in the fourth chapter. No man

save one who was walking with God would have been able to foretell disaster to, and also rebuke, the great king of whom it was said, "Whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down." Clearly then Daniel who was "set up" at that moment had no fear at the prospect of being "put down." It also stands to reason that no man would have been able to boldly counsel righteousness and mercy as he did save one who habitually practised those virtues himself.

In due time the next change came. We have no record of how it came, but that it did come Daniel 5: 11 to 13 declares. Apparently Daniel dropped into obscurity for many years. It may have been that with the death of Nebuchadnezzar, who respected him, he was forgotten; anyway, it is evident that he was living in complete obscurity in the days of Belshazzar. The queen-mother in Belshazzar's feast on that fatal night remembered him, and his divine gifts, but the very terms in which she describes him prove that to the king and his thousand lords he was utterly unknown.

What an immense compliment to Daniel was this! He had neither part nor lot in the riotous iniquities of Belshazzar's degenerate court. We see here — all honour to him! — the same Daniel as first appeared in Daniel 1, resolutely separate from evil. And there is more than this. It was in the latter years of this period of eclipse that he received the first two of those wonderful visions vouchsafed to him. They are recorded in Daniel 7 and Daniel 8. During this time when he was *down* he was evidently much in communion with heaven.

On that last dread night Daniel flashed like a meteor across the Chaldean sky. In spite of the terrible nature of his message, and his own contemptuous refusal of Belshazzar's honours, he was clothed in scarlet, with a gold chain about his neck, and he was proclaimed the third ruler in the kingdom. He was up once more.

Up, as he himself knew right well, only for a few brief hours. That night Babylon fell before the hosts of Darius, Belshazzar was slain, and the Chaldean empire was no more. As part of the governmental fabric by his new appointment, Daniel fell with it, and naturally lapsed once more into obscurity.

For the third time the period of being "*down* in the world" became a season of great profit. The first two verses of Daniel 9: 1-2 show us that Daniel used this fresh time of retirement in the study of Scripture. Reading attentively in the book of Jeremiah he came across the prediction in Jeremiah 29: 10 that the desolations of Jerusalem were on this occasion to be limited to seventy years. The discovery of this unexpected grace brought him to his knees in an agony of confession and prayer. Was not the judgment of the very power that had overthrown Jerusalem the dawn of hope? Was not the time of their weeping nearly at an end? His prayer vibrates with the spirit of hope and repentance, and he who can read it in cold print without emotion must have a hard heart indeed.

His prayer was that of a righteous man, fervent and effectual, and brought down an immediate answer. Further revelations reached him ere he had properly ceased, and through him there was given the prophecy of the "seventy weeks," the time-table of Israel's destiny on which was clearly marked the exact time of the death of their great Messiah, and our adorable Saviour.

In due time we once more find Daniel *exalted*. The man who steadily walks with God in adversity cannot be hid. We know not how, but somehow his excellent qualities become known to Darius, the new ruler, and in Daniel 6 we find him moving on the ascending scale, until as the chief of the three presidents over the princes he is next to the king in authority.

Once more in this exalted station we find the same fearless fidelity to God coupled with grace and

meekness and the absence of self-advertisement for which he is deservedly famous. Nothing is a greater evidence of strength than the ability in a great crisis to proceed exactly as before. The weak man either trims his sail to catch the passing breeze, and alters so as to comply with what is popular, or else he attempts to signalise his non-compliance by becoming ultra and extreme and rude. Daniel proceeded just "as he did aforesaid."

How dramatically he was flung *down* into the den of lions, every Sunday-school child knows, and we need not repeat it. By the next morning he was up again, up higher than ever if possible, and that to the great glory of his God. This period of exaltation lasted for long into the reign of Cyrus, probably to the end of his life.

As to this time of prosperity two things may be said. First he was permitted to see the prophecy of Jeremiah fulfilled, and the decree for the rebuilding of the much-loved house of God issued (see Dan. 6: 10, Ezra 1: 1). Indeed from his exalted place he may have had a share in bringing it to pass. Second, he was as much in touch with God during this last period of eminence in old age as ever. It was in the third year of Cyrus, two years after the issuing of the decree, that the final vision by the river Hiddekel was given to him, and that he was twice saluted as "a man greatly beloved."

That vision closed, as recorded in Daniel 12, by a plain intimation to Daniel that he was yet once more to go *down*, and that into a darker eclipse, according to nature's standards, than any he had yet known. And yet, though death should take him off the scene long before the advent of the promised glory, so that the last "down" he should ever know would be the quiet of the grave, even that sombre announcement was tinged with the gold of this thought, that his waiting time should be a season of rest, and with the yet far brighter thought that when the glory did dawn and its blessing flood the scene he should not be missing, for he should "stand in his lot at the end of days." This prediction clearly entitled him to close his aged eyes upon earth with his heart illumined with the light of resurrection.

In the day of Messiah's peaceful and changeless glory, thou, O Daniel, the man greatly beloved, wilt look back upon thy changeful life of ups and downs, and say, "Such experiences, though trying at the time, were well worth while, for they have enriched my soul to eternity with a knowledge of God, which is as gold seven times purified in a furnace."

Let us start upon the unknown 1916 with all its ups and downs with something of this spirit. Though conscious of how very inferior to him we are, we yet may sing

"Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone."

But if we do we shall do well to couple with it that other hymn which says-

"The GOD that lived in Daniel's time

Is just the same today."