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November 1904

Going Through and Getting me  
Re Phillip H Wickstead M.A.

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H. L. Coupland M.A.

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GOING THROUGH AND  
GETTING OVER.

A DISCOURSE

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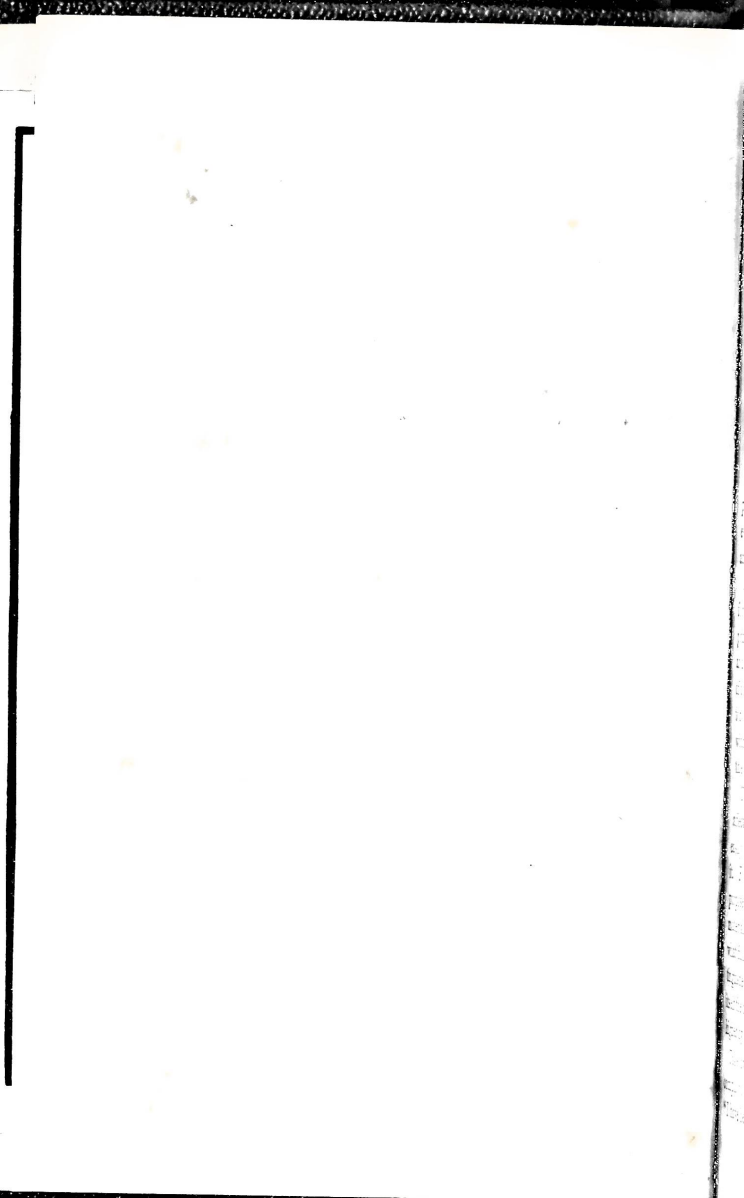
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## READINGS.

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### I. Passages from the Third and Fourth Books of the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

IF thou workest at that which is before thee, following right reason seriously, vigorously, calmly, without allowing anything else to distract thee, but keeping thy divine part pure, as if thou shouldst be bound to give it back immediately; if thou holdest to this, expecting nothing, fearing nothing, but satisfied with thy present activity, according to nature, and with heroic truth in every word and sound which thou utterest, thou wilt live happy; and there is no man who is able to prevent this.

As physicians have always their instruments and knives ready for cases which suddenly require their skill, so do thou have principles ready for the understanding of things divine and human, and for doing everything, even the smallest, with a recollection of the bond which unites the divine and human to one another; for neither wilt thou do anything well which pertains to man without at the same time having a reference to things divine, nor the contrary.

That which rules within, when it is according to nature, is so affected with respect to the events which happen, that it always easily adapts itself to that which is possible and is presented to it. For it requires no definite material, but it moves towards its purpose—under certain conditions, however—and it makes a material for itself out of that which opposes it, as fire lays hold of what falls into it, by which a small light would have been extinguished; but when the fire is strong, it soon appropriates to itself the matter which is heaped on it, and consumes it, and rises higher by means of this very material.

Take away thy opinion, and then there is taken away the complaint, "I have been harmed." Take away the complaint, "I have been harmed," and the harm is taken away.

That which does not make a man worse than he was, also does not make his life worse, nor does it harm him either from within or from without.

Do not have such an opinion of things as he has who does the wrong, or such as he wishes thee to have, but look at them as they are in truth. Within ten days thou wilt seem a god to those to whom thou art now a beast and an ape, if thou wilt return to thy principles and the worship of reason.

How much trouble he avoids who does not look to see what his neighbour says, or does, or thinks, but only to what he does himself, that it may be just and pure ; or, as Agathon says, "look not round at the depraved morals of others, but run straight along the line without deviating from it."

Do not disturb thyself. Make thyself all simplicity. Does anyone do wrong ? It is to himself that he does the wrong. Has anything happened to thee ? Well, out of the universe, from the beginning, everything which happens has been apportioned and spun out to thee. In a word, thy life is short. Thou must turn to profit the present by the aid of justice and reason. Be sober in thy relaxation. Love the art, poor as it may be, which thou hast learned, and be content with it ; and pass through the rest of life like one who has entrusted to the gods, with his whole soul, all that he has, making thyself neither the tyrant nor the slave of any man.

Thou will soon die, and thou art not yet simple, nor free from perturbations, nor without suspicion of being hurt by external things, nor kindly disposed towards all, nor dost thou yet place wisdom only in acting justly.

\* \* N.B.—The translation used is that of Mr. George Long. Bell and Daldy, 1862.

II. Job, Chaps. I—II : 10.

## “GOING THROUGH AND GETTING OVER.”

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SOME difficulties have to be gone *through*, others have to be got *over*, and sometimes it seems as if almost all the waste and deterioration of lives that have real good in them were caused by the attempt to get through what must be got over and to get over what must be got through.

Some people seem to fret away their whole strength in struggling against the thousand small vexations and annoyances of life. They are never without a grievance, never without a worry. Some one has always been insulting or slighting them, or treating them unfairly or misrepresenting or misunderstanding them; or some most unlucky chance has thwarted their projects and stood between them and their lawful prize; or in some way they are the victims of men or things, and must be set right. One man must be exposed, another must make an apology; one must listen to explanation, or another must make one! This provoking regulation or practice must be removed, and the little details



which appear to confuse and harass life so much must all be set in order. And if the tangled mass of complication and annoyances is at last reduced to order, in a fortnight it is all confusion again! There are more misunderstandings, more annoyances, more slights, more worries and vexations, and all is as bad as ever! Is not the secret weakness of such a life as this due to the attempt to get *through* what ought to be got *over*? A life may easily be spent in trying to set right things that never can be set right and might just as well be left wrong. In attempting to solve problems that ought not to be recognised as problems at all; in attempting to arrange according to our own ideas things about which we ought to care enough to have any ideas at all concerning them.

And again, it has become a commonplace with all satirists that the high aspirations of youth die away in manhood, that the generous and impulsive boy becomes the grasping, cautious man, and the romantic, disinterested girl, becomes the worldly and selfish woman, and when all allowance has been made for exaggeration and misrepresentation there remains only too much truth in the sneer. Who can say how many generous aspirations and lofty hopes, how many resolves to right some wrong or relieve some suffering, have died between sixteen and thirty? How many who had resolved to do something to make the world better than they found it, have ended by striving only to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the world as it is. How familiar in our ears are the words—which always seem to me to ring the knell

of a dead soul—"Oh yes! I began life with very romantic ideas on such and such a subject. But when you are a little older you will find—" and so on! How is it that with growing strength this weakening of the higher life so often goes hand-in-hand? Is it not because people are so apt to get *over* what they ought to go *through*. Religious doubts and difficulties trouble them—they get over them instead of through them; deep sorrows come over their lives, again they get over instead of through them; problems of social and domestic duty present themselves to them, they get over them instead of going through them! To shirk all the real problems of life as if they needed no solving, to work at the miserable little problems of life as if they were soluble or worth solving—this is to make the great mistake between *through* and *over*, and to waste the true power of our lives.

With this key in our hands, then, let us once more consider the small and great problems of life and the spirit in which we should meet them.

Every mechanic knows the importance of diminishing friction in working his machines, and the small annoyances, personal or other, of our daily lot, are the friction of life, which may become so intolerable as first to work us to fever heat of impatience and fretfulness, and then make us burst into flames of passion in which our whole strength is consumed!

No life is free from this friction. We all stand in numerous and complicated relations with both persons and things; and neither persons nor

things conduct themselves solely with a view of saving us annoyance. The harmony of these relations, therefore, is constantly liable to be disturbed. In the first place, those thousand unrecognised sequences of cause and effect, which make up the material background and framework of our lives, and which we quaintly but expressively speak of as "things," are, as we all know, apt to "go wrong." There is nothing for it but to go on and not mind it. "Fret not thyself," said an old Greek dramatist, "Fret not thyself because of *things*, for they care naught about it!" Many a life is fretted to pieces, is kept in a constant state of heat and soreness from the inability to get over the wrongness of things, from a constant effort, destined from its very nature to be a constant failure, to get *through* the minute problems of daily life, which are not really problems to be solved at all, but simply incidents to be accepted. If we get through one set, we are simply involved in another, for they grow in rank luxuriance in the soil of human life, and there is no greater delusion than to suppose that if "things" are once put straight, after our conception of straightness, they will remain so ever after. The one and only way of dealing with these difficulties is to get above them, to establish ourselves permanently in a region to which they cannot reach. There is as much philosophy as there is wit in the poet's description of his friends: "Should aught annoy them they refuse to be annoyed." And when we have once succeeded in lifting ourselves out of these vexations, we discover how largely they were due to our own chafed and

heated tempers, and how the very determination to go over them has removed them out of our way.

But all this is still more true of that large number of vexations and annoyances which rise more directly from our relations with each other. The whole life of some people seems entirely to consist of misunderstandings and explanations, and giving and taking offence ; and as every explanation gives rise to fresh misunderstandings, the weary round goes on for ever. Some one is always slighting us, or trying to make use of us, or neglecting us, or refusing us our dues, or treating us disrespectfully. So and so might have done this, and need not have done that ; and really we have a right to claim this, and ought not to be exposed to that ; and we are always trying to put things straight. But as long as we remain in the same state of mind things cannot be put straight. We are trying to get through these personal vexations, but we cannot. We are cutting our way through an infinite jungle, and it is vain to suppose that if we could struggle through a little further, we should come to the open country. As long as we are open to vexation from these things we shall be vexed by them ! Our only chance is to get above them, into quite another stratum of life, where they do not affect us. Really, it is no matter whether we are appreciated or not. It is no matter whether we are treated with due respect ; no matter whether our feelings are considered ; no matter whether we are fairly treated. If we have any love of our work, if we have any true self-respect, we shall not fight for petty points of precedence, but shall go on our way

heedless of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, shall live down all unworthy reports or suspicions, and shall be taken in the long run pretty much for what we are worth. Let the men of Belial refuse Saul the honour he so well deserves, but let not the flashing blade of Saul soil itself with their craven blood! Let Shimei cast dirt at David, but let not David's royal hand pollute itself by casting it back!

All these small and personal vexations, all this friction of daily life we must get over, for we cannot get through them. And we shall get over them best by living a real life and grappling with the real problems of life—those which we ought to work through, which we often try to get over. Let us take one or two examples—resembling each other only in this, that all belong to the deeper currents of life, that all are real problems, without the solution of which the meaning of life is lost.

First let us speak of those sorrows of life which spring from disappointed or wounded affection, or from the loss, in whatever form it may occur, of those who are dear to us. These sorrows we may try to get over, or we may try to go through! To get over them is to forget them, or to give up thinking about them, or to cease regarding them as really sorrowful; to go through them is to learn what they have to teach us, what they mean to us, to throw the light of God's consolation and strength upon them, and then take them up and weave them into the tissue of our lives. Common-place consolation urges us to turn our thoughts to other things, to go away and try what

change of scene and of occupation will do, to get away from our sorrow, to push it aside, keep our thoughts off it and forget it. Is not this advising us to kill a part of our life? To lock up and desert one of the chambers of our heart, hang a curtain over the door of it, try to forget that it exists? It is against such advice that Miss Procter so nobly protests in her beautiful poem :—

“ Do not cheat thy heart, and tell her  
     ‘ Grief will pass away ;  
 Hope for fairer times in future,  
     And forget to-day.’ ”  
 Tell her, if you will, that sorrow  
     Need not come in vain ;  
 Tell her that the lesson taught her  
     Far outweighs the pain.

Cheat her not with the old comfort,  
     “ Soon she will forget ”—  
 Bitter truth, alas—but matter  
     Rather for regret ;  
 Bid her not “ Seek other pleasures,  
     Turn to other things : ”—  
 Rather nurse her caged sorrow  
     Till the captive sings.

Rather bid her go forth bravely,  
     And the stranger greet ;  
 Not as foe, with spear and buckler,  
     But as dear friends meet ;  
 Bid her with a strong clasp hold her,  
     By her dusky wings—  
 Listening to the murmured blessing  
     Sorrow always brings.”



Doubtless there is a danger here also, especially in the lines—

“ Rather nurse her caged sorrow  
Till the captive sings.”

It is a grievous and unrighteous thing to brood over a sorrow, to dwell upon it in the very luxury of grief until it absorbs our lives, and this is the truth that lies at the bottom of the usual advice—turn to other things. It is sound enough if it only means to stimulate the smitten soul to fresh action and revive the stagnant currents of its life, but the very strength thus gained must be used in living through, not in getting over, the sorrow. If a portion of our life has been smitten by a sorrow, and we try to forget it, to put it away, we are then hewing off one of our limbs, we are paralyzing one of the powers of our soul. He that thinks he has got over a real sorrow, has but withdrawn the life-blood from a part of himself and is so far dead to the higher life. He that has lived through a sorrow has purified in the fire a part of himself, has found out what is temporal and what eternal in it, has passed behind the veil and stood face to face with the reality, has had all the dross burned and purged away and God's precious and pure metal saved to him from the purifying fire!

There is another life-problem which it seems must, in some form or another, be presented to most earnest men, though the form under which it meets us differs from age to age, and now demands a greater now a less degree of persevering effort and courage for its

solution. To each of us there comes a period when religion can no longer be authoritative or traditional, but must become individual and personal. It is for the most part a gloomy, lonely struggle! What once was certain, now becomes doubtful; what we had been taught to lean upon as the staff of life, proves to be a mere broken reed, or pierces into our flesh! It is the time of the awakening of our religious life, but sometimes we think it is the hour of its death. When this season of religious doubt and difficulty meets us, we stand face to face with one of the most solemn and mysterious of all life-problems! Here again the advice often given is, in effect, "Shut your eyes to it! Refuse to recognise it! Put it aside and think of other things!" The story is well known of the clergyman who had difficulties as to the truth of the Thirty-nine Articles, and asked the advice of an eminent and pious friend. He was urged to devote himself to his parish work, as that was the best way of settling all theological doubts! This is a type of the kind advice often given in these cases, and it has a certain amount of truth and value in it. If it simply means to urge men not to allow themselves to drop into a morbid and self-centred way of looking at things apart from the healthy realities life and work, the advice is good, but if it means that all these theological or religious doubts should be simply set aside and neglected, that we should turn our thoughts away from them and try to get over them, then, surely, it is utterly miserable and fruitless. We must face all our doubts and difficulties, we must question them and



examine them to the utmost, we must go right through with them, like Abraham going forth in faith, we know not whither, and then whatever may be the final outcome our beliefs will be our own, we shall have fought for them and won them; as princes having wrestled and overcome, we shall have power with God and with men. It often happens that at the end of this mental conflict we are in many points of actual belief, pretty much where we were at the beginning, but there is all the difference between having worked the problem through and solved it ourselves, and having accepted the conclusions of another without examination, just because we feared they might turn out to be incorrect. The man who has put away his religious life-problem can never have a faith on which to rest as upon a rock, for this is the privilege of him who has gone through and not passed by the dark valley of religious doubt.

I will only refer very briefly to one more life-problem, which one would think must present itself to every earnest and thoughtful man. The social condition of the world in which we live, even when we set aside the pauperism and the crime which disfigure modern society, can not appear to anyone satisfactorily. The immense inequalities in the share of enjoyment, ease, culture, above all moral and religious advantages, which fall to the different classes of society must be a source of grief to every right-minded man. What can I individually do towards restricting and modifying this evil? This is a very practical life-problem for each of us. We may shirk it by saying that we cannot help

these things, that they are ordained of God, and that if we are born amongst the privileged ones so much the better—we must be thankful; if not, we must be content in the position in which God has placed us. On the other hand, we may work through this problem, and find, according to our station, some clear way in a wider or narrower circle of spreading happiness, goodness, and culture amongst those around us, and doing something towards compensating the less favoured of mankind. In time, in thought, in money, in sympathy we can find some way of sacrificing ourselves to those who need our help, and according to our light and in our degree bringing a contribution to the solution of the social problem.

Even if it were our hard fate to spend all our life in striving to understand some sorrow and to learn its lesson, and yet failing to do so, in manfully striving to gain some real faith of our own, and yet failing ever to reach it, in earnestly seeking some means of helping our fellow-men, and yet finding none, yet surely even this sad lot would be nobler and more worthy of our emulation than the peace which is the fruit of the spiritual death, the contentment, which simply means that we have ceased to care for the great problems of life. But for almost all of us, if we meet the problems of life like men, after a longer or shorter time of dark wrestling of the spirit, the light dawns, and each day, almost each hour, our faith becomes clearer and stronger and more joyously triumphant over doubt, our purposes for good become more settled and firm, our love becomes purer and more exalted, we have

met as messengers from God, and have not shunned, as devil-born, the problems of life, and "like as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so has God's word been that has come forth to us from His mouth: it has not returned unto Him void, but it has accomplished in us that which He pleased, and it has prospered in us in the thing whereto He sent it." We have been raised out of the small vexations and worries of life, have got *over* what some fret away their lives in trying to get *through*, and have got *through* what some get *over* at the cost of all the better possibilities of their lives.