

THE VALLEY OF VISION

*A Collection of Puritan Prayers
and Devotions*

Edited by
Arthur Bennett

The burden of the valley of vision
ISAIAH 22:1



THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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TO MY COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS AT
ALL NATIONS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, WARE,
FOR TEN YEARS' FELLOWSHIP
IN CHRIST

Preface

The prayers in this book are drawn from the largely forgotten deposit of Puritan spiritual exercises, meditations and aspirations. They testify to the richness and colour of evangelical thought and language that animated vital piety in an important stream of English religious life. It is hoped that their publication will help to redress the neglect of this vast ocean of Puritan spirituality.

The Puritan Movement was a religious phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet its influence continued at least to the time of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) who may be regarded as the last of the great Puritans. Although the political storm ended in 1660, its theological ground-swell carried forward distinct forms of practical religion for many decades, particularly family worship and private devotion. In these spheres, and in that of the authority of Scripture over the whole of life, New England Presbyterians and Congregationalists were at one with English Dissenters and Anglican evangelicals in a close-knit union that transcended differences of worship, discipline and polity. They spoke the same spiritual language, shared the same code of values, adopted the same attitude towards the Christian religion, and breathed out the same God-centred aspirations in a manner that makes it impossible to distinguish the voice of conformist from that of non-conformist. Thus, this book of Puritan prayers has a unity not often found in similar works. The strength of Puritan character and life lay in the practice of prayer and meditation. Many of those who held the doctrines of grace wrote down a record of God's intimate dealings with their souls, not with an eye to publication, but, as in David Brainerd's case, to test their spiritual growth, and to encourage themselves by their re-perusal in times of low spiritual fervour. Others, like William Jay and Henry Law, turned their personal devotions into corporate forms for family worship, and published them to the church at large. Yet others, such as Philip Doddridge and William Romaine, wrote prayers into their literary works in order to evoke the reader's spiritual response. Many ministers went further and advised their congregations to put their private prayer thoughts on paper and vocalize them. There thus emerged an important corpus of inspiring Puritan prayers that are still largely unused.

In extracting this selection from Puritan literature it has been necessary to change some prayers from the plural and the third person into the singular and the first person in order that the book might be used chiefly in private devotion. But, by a change of pronoun, most of them can be employed in corporate worship. A final section has been added for occasions of corporate worship. Old idiom has been retained, but it has been necessary to reframe some phrases in order to accommodate archaic thought to modern understanding. A number of prayers were originally spiritual experiences, as in the case of Thomas Shepard, and some others are confections from different sources to bind together a given theme.

A poetic form has been adopted throughout as an aid to easier comprehension and utterance. Each prayer consists of a number of main clauses with subsidiary clauses that illuminate and enlarge the subject. In this way an opportunity is provided for pauses and reflections. The editor is thus responsible for the structure of the prayers as here printed. The book is not intended to be read as a prayer manual. The soul learns to pray by praying; for prayer is communion with a transcendent and immanent God who on the ground of his nature and attributes calls forth all the powers of the redeemed soul in acts of total adoration and dedication. The prayers should therefore be used as aspiration units, the several parts of which could become springboards for the individual's own prayer subjects. These and their divisions can also serve homiletic purposes.

The prayers are taken from the works of Thomas Shepard, Thomas Watson, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Isaac Watts, William Williams, Philip Doddridge, William Romaine, David Brainerd, Augustus Toplady, Christmas Evans, William Jay, Henry Law and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. They are sent out with the prayer of Philip Doddridge, that, 'However weak and contemptible this work may seem in the eyes of the children of this world, and however imperfect it really be, it may nevertheless live before thee, and through a divine power be mighty to produce the rise and progress of religion.'

I desire to thank the Rev. Iain H. Murray of the Banner of Truth Trust for his encouragement to produce this work, Mr S. M. Houghton, many of whose kindly criticisms have been accepted, and the Rev. R. E. Davies, who helped to resolve theological points. I am grateful to the Trustees of the British Museum, Dr Williams' Library, and the Evangelical Library for access to out-of-print books.

ARTHUR BENNETT

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Introductory

THE VALLEY OF VISION

THE VALLEY OF VISION

LORD, HIGH AND HOLY, MEEK AND LOWLY,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision,
 where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;
 hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold thy glory.

Let me learn by paradox
 that the way down is the way up,
 that to be low is to be high,
 that the broken heart is the healed heart,
 that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
 that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
 that to have nothing is to possess all,
 that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
 that to give is to receive,
 that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
 and the deeper the wells the brighter thy stars shine;

Let me find thy light in my darkness,
 thy life in my death,
 thy joy in my sorrow,
 thy grace in my sin,
 thy riches in my poverty
 thy glory in my valley.

I

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

THE TRINITY

THREE IN ONE, ONE IN THREE, GOD OF MY SALVATION,
Heavenly Father, blessed Son, eternal Spirit,

I adore thee as one Being, one Essence,
one God in three distinct Persons,

for bringing sinners to thy knowledge and to thy kingdom.

O Father, thou hast loved me and sent Jesus to redeem me;

O Jesus, thou hast loved me and assumed my nature,
shed thine own blood to wash away my sins,
wrought righteousness to cover my unworthiness;

O Holy Spirit, thou hast loved me and entered my heart,
implanted there eternal life,
revealed to me the glories of Jesus.

Three Persons and one God, I bless and praise thee,
for love so unmerited, so unspeakable, so wondrous,
so mighty to save the lost and raise them to glory.

O Father, I thank thee that in fullness of grace
thou hast given me to Jesus,
to be his sheep, jewel, portion;

O Jesus, I thank thee that in fullness of grace
thou hast accepted, espoused, bound me;

O Holy Spirit, I thank thee that in fullness of grace
thou hast exhibited Jesus as my salvation,
implanted faith within me,
subdued my stubborn heart,
made me one with him for ever.

O Father, thou art enthroned to hear my prayers,

O Jesus, thy hand is outstretched to take my petitions,

O Holy Spirit, thou art willing to help my infirmities,
to show me my need, to supply words, to pray within me,
to strengthen me that I faint not in supplication.

O Triune God, who commandeth the universe,
thou hast commanded me to ask for those things
that concern thy kingdom and my soul.

Let me live and pray as one baptized into the threefold Name.

GOD THE ALL

O GOD WHOSE WILL CONQUERS ALL,
There is no comfort in anything
 apart from enjoying thee
 and being engaged in thy service;
Thou art All in all, and all enjoyments are what to me
 thou makest them, and no more.
I am well pleased with thy will, whatever it is,
 or should be in all respects,
And if thou bidst me decide for myself in any affair,
 I would choose to refer all to thee,
 for thou art infinitely wise and cannot do amiss
 as I am in danger of doing.
I rejoice to think that all things are at thy disposal,
 and it delights me to leave them there.
Then prayer turns wholly into praise,
 and all I can do is to adore and bless thee.
What shall I give thee for all thy benefits?
I am in a strait betwixt two, knowing not what to do;
I long to make some return, but have nothing to offer,
 and can only rejoice that thou doest all,
 that none in heaven or on earth shares thy honour;
 I can of myself do nothing to glorify thy blessed name,
 but I can through grace cheerfully surrender soul and body to thee,
I know that thou art the author and finisher of faith,
 that the whole work of redemption is thine alone,
 that every good work or thought found in me
 is the effect of thy power and grace,
 that thy sole motive in working in me to will and to do
 is for thy good pleasure.
O God, it is amazing that men can talk so much
 about man's creaturely power and goodness,
 when, if thou didst not hold us back every moment,
 we should be devils incarnate.
This, by bitter experience, thou hast taught me concerning myself.