

HIS BANNER OVER ME

by

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CHAPTER ONE

PAIN

WHY SHOULD I write of pain? Pain is a private matter. So are sorrow and suffering. Their battles are not to be fought in the public arena. Sometimes, it is true, there is the victor's crown, but often enough the dust of defeat . . .

I look at this thin body of mine, which has suffered so much. Long ago it was erect and untwisted. The mirror shows me a face marked by lines of anguish and weariness. Sometimes I hate that body and that face, as one shrinks from the body and face of an enemy. Other times I give it only pity for its fate of being host to that strange inmate, Pain.

Few have entirely escaped pain, if only in a lesser degree. Many must live in a terrible intimacy with this alien thing until released by death.

Pain is ancient; almost as old as humanity, fully as old as sin. Pain strives to be king. Its chariot is a plow which digs deep furrows; its entourage, weakness and discouragement, weariness and depression, false hopes and broken dreams.

Pain has its own peculiar problems: financial, mental, nervous and spiritual. There is the daily, hourly, never ending task of trying to keep normal, to maintain balance, mentally and spiritually, when one is all unfit physically. What is to be done with sleepless nights, to make them profitable? With wasted moments, that they may bear fruit? What compensates for the growing weakness of body as it breaks functionally under the strain?

Pain likewise has its own distinct vocabulary. The shocked ears in time grow used to hearing words which once were strange when applied to one's self—tuberculosis, temperature, hemorrhage, asthma, gall bladder, arthritis, ankylosed spine, angina, sinus trouble, anemia, ulcers, amoeba, Parkinson's Disease, cancer. A grim procession when these are but words: grimmer yet when they are actual facts.

I have been asked to write the story of my life. I had thought it would be an easy thing to do. But I discovered that in order to write of those long years of illness and sorrow, I must relive them; and this is too hard a task to ask of me. I have endured them once—is not that enough? You who are well, why should I open the door of my life and introduce you to these strange guests whom you would not like? You who are ill, you already know their faces too well.

Not only their faces but the problems they bring, their implacable ways, their insatiable demands for their pound of flesh, even their very vocabulary. Why should I reiterate the dismal chant?

Instead, for your refreshment I have written a simple tale of my childhood and youth. I have gathered you with me about a kerosene lamp in an old-fashioned Christian home around the turn of the century. I have even bared to you the heart of a frail child whose very frailty God was pleased to use as an instrument for His service and glory.

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