

THE CROWN OF THORNS

NO. 1168

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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head.”
 Matthew 27:29.*

BEFORE we enter the common hall of the soldiers and gaze upon “the sacred head once wounded,” it will be well to consider who and what He was who was thus cruelly put to shame. Forget not the intrinsic excellence of His Person, for He is the brightness of the Father's Glory and the express image of His Person. He is in Himself God over all, blessed forever, the eternal Word by whom all things were made and by whom all things consist. Though Heir of all things, the Prince of the kings of the earth, He was despised and rejected of men, “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” His head was scornfully surrounded with thorns for a crown. His body was bedecked with a faded purple robe. A poor reed was put into His hand for a scepter, and then the ribald soldiers dared to spit upon His face, and worry Him with their filthy jests—

*“The soldiers also spit upon that face
 Which angels did desire to have the grace,
 And Prophets once to see, but found no place.
 Was ever grief like Mine?”*

Forget not the glory to which He had been accustomed, for before He came to earth He had been in the bosom of the Father, adored of cherubim and seraphim, obeyed by every angel, worshipped by every principality and power in the heavenly places! Yet here He sits, treated worse than a felon, made the center of a comedy before He became the victim of a tragedy. They sat Him down in some broken chair, covered Him with an old soldier's cloak, and then insulted Him as a mimic monarch—

*“They bow their knees to Me, and cry, Hail king.
 Whatever scoffs and scornfulness can bring,
 I am the floor, the sink, where they'd fling.
 Was ever grief like Mine?”*

What a descent His love to us compelled Him to make! See how He fell to lift us from our Fall! Do not, also, fail to remember that at the very time when they were thus mocking Him, He was still the Lord of All and could have summoned 12 legions of angels to His rescue. There was majesty in His misery! He had laid aside, it is true, the glorious imperial pomp of His Father's courts, and He was now the lowly Man of Nazareth, but for all that, had He willed it, one glance of those eyes would have withered up the Roman cohorts. One word from those silent lips would have shaken Pilate's palace from roof to foundation—and had He willed it—the vacillating governor and the malicious crowd would, together, have gone down alive into the pit, even as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram of old!

Lo, God's own Son, Heaven's Darling and earth's Prince, sits there and wears the cruel chaplet which wounds both mind and body at once—the mind with insult, and the body with piercing pain! His royal face was marred with “wounds which could not cease to bleed, trickling faint and slow.” Yet that “noblest brow and dearest head” had once been fairer than the children of men and was even, then, the countenance of Immanuel, God with us! Remember these things and you will gaze upon Him with enlightened eyes and tender hearts—and you will be able, the more fully, to enter into fellowship with Him in His griefs. Remember from where He came and it will the more astound you that He should have stooped so low! Remember what He was and it will be the more marvelous that He should become our Substitute.

And now let us press into the guard room and look at our Savior wearing His crown of thorns. I will not detain you long with any guesses as to what kind of thorns He wore. According to the Rabbis and the botanists, there would seem to have been from 20 to 25 different species of thorny plants growing in Palestine. And different writers have, according to their own judgments or fancies, selected one and another of these plants as the peculiar thorns which were used upon this

occasion. But why select one thorn out of many? He bore not one grief, but *all*—any and every thorn will suffice. The very dubiousness as to the peculiar species yields us instruction.

It may well be that more than one kind of thorn was platted in that crown—at any rate sin has so thickly strewn the earth with thorns and thistles that there was no difficulty in finding the materials, even as there was no scarcity of griefs with which to chasten Him every morning and make Him a mourner all His days. The soldiers may have used pliant boughs of the acacia, or shittim tree—that unrotting wood of which many of the sacred tables and vessels of the sanctuary were made—and, therefore, significantly used if such were the case. It may have been true, as the old writers generally consider, that the plant was the *spina Christi*, for it has many small and sharp spines. And its green leaves would have made a wreath such as those with which generals and emperors were crowned after a battle.

But we will leave the matter. It was a crown of thorns which pierced His head and caused Him suffering as well as shame—and that suffices us. Our inquiry, now, is—what do we see when our eyes behold Jesus Christ crowned with thorns? There are six things which strike me most. And as I lift the curtain I pray you watch with me and may the Holy Spirit pour forth His Divine illumination and light up the scene before our wondering souls.

I. The first thing which is seen by the most casual observer, before he looks beneath the surface, is A SORROWFUL SPECTACLE. Here is the Christ, the generous, loving, tender Christ, treated with indignity and scorn! Here is the Prince of Life and Glory made an object of derision by ribald soldiers! Behold, today, the lily among thorns, Purity, itself, in the midst of opposing sin! See here the Sacrifice caught in the thicket, and held fast there, as a victim in our place to fulfill the ancient type of the ram held by the bushes which Abraham slew instead of Isaac!

Three things are to be carefully noted in this spectacle of sorrow. Here is Christ's *lowliness and weakness triumphed over* by the lusty soldiers. When they brought Jesus into the guard room they felt that He was entirely in their power and that His claims to be a king were so absurd as to be only a theme for contemptuous jest. He was but meanly dressed, for He wore only the smock frock of a peasant—was He a claimant of the purple? He held His peace—was He the man to stir a nation to sedition? He was all wounds and bruises, fresh from the scourger's lash—was He the hero to inspire an army's enthusiasm and overturn old Rome?

It seemed rare mirth for them and as wild beasts sport with their victims, so did they. Many, I warrant you, were the jibes and jeers of the Roman soldiers at His expense, and loud was the laughter amid their ranks. Look at His face, how meek He appears! How different from the haughty countenances of tyrants! To mock His royal claims seemed but natural to rough soldiers. He was gentle as a child, tender as a woman! His dignity was that of calm quiet endurance—and this was not a dignity whose force these semi-barbarous men could feel and, therefore they did pour contempt upon Him. Let us remember that our Lord's weakness was undertaken for our sakes—for us He became a lamb—for us He laid aside His Glory. And therefore it is the more painful for us to see that this voluntary humiliation of Himself must be made the object of so much derision and scorn, though worthy of the utmost praise.

He stoops to save us and we laugh at Him as He stoops! He leaves the Truth of God that He may lift us up to it, but while He is graciously descending, the hoarse laughter of an ungodly world is His only reward! Ah, me, was ever love treated after so unlovely a sort? Surely the cruelty it received was proportioned to the honor it deserved, so perverse are the sons of men—

*“O head so full of bruises!
Brow that its lifeblood loses!
Oh great humility.
Upon His face are falling
Indignities most galling!
He bears them all for me.”*

It was not merely that they mocked His humility, but *they mocked His claims to be a king*. “Aha,” they seemed to say, “is this a king? It must be after some uncouth Jewish fashion, surely, that this poor Peasant claims to wear a crown. Is this the Son of David? When will He drive Caesar and his armies into the sea and set up a new state, and reign at Rome? This Jew, this Peasant—is He to fulfill His nation's dream and rule over all mankind?

Wonderfully did they ridicule this idea and we do not wonder that they did, for they could not perceive His true Glory. But, Beloved, my point lies here, *He was a King* in the truest and most emphatic sense. If He had not been a king, then He would, as an impostor, have deserved the scorn, but would not have keenly felt it. But being truly and really a

King, every word must have stung His royal soul and every syllable must have cut His kingly spirit to the quick. When the impostor's claims are exposed and held up to scorn, he himself must well know that he deserves all the contempt he receives—and what can he say? But if the real Heir to all the estates of Heaven and earth has His claims denied and His Person mocked—then is His heart wounded and rebuke and reproach fill Him with many sorrows.

Is it not sad that the Son of God, the blessed and only Potentate, should have been thus disgraced? Nor was it merely mockery, but *cruelty added pain to insult*. If they had only intended to mock Him, they might have platted a crown of *straw*. But they meant to *hurt* Him and, therefore, they fashioned a crown of *thorns*. Look, I pray you, at His Person as He suffers under their hands! They had scourged Him till probably there was no part of His body which was not bleeding beneath their blows—except His head—and now that head must be made to suffer, too.

Alas, our whole head was sick and our whole heart faint—and so He must be made, in His chastisement, like unto us in our transgression. There was no part of our humanity without sin—and there must be no part of His humanity without *suffering*. If we had escaped, in some measure, from iniquity, so might He have escaped from pain. But as we had worn the foul garment of transgression and it covered us from head to foot, even so must He wear the garments of shame and derision from the crown of His head, even to the sole of His feet—

*“O Love, too boundless to be shown
By any but the Lord alone!
O Love offended, which sustains
The bold offender's curse and pains!
O Love, which could no motive have,
But mere benignity to save.”*

Beloved, I always feel as if my tongue were tied when I come to talk of the sufferings of my Master. I can *think* of them. I can *picture* them to myself. I can sit down and weep over them, but I know not how to paint them to others! Did you ever know pen or pencil that could? A Michelangelo or a Raphael might well shrink back from attempting to paint this picture! And the tongue of an archangel might be consumed in the effort to sing the griefs of Him who was loaded with shame because of our shameful transgressions.

I ask you rather to meditate than to listen—and to sit down and view your Lord with your own loving eyes rather than to have regard words of mine. I can only sketch the picture, roughly outlining it as with charcoal. I must leave you to put in the colors and then to sit and study it—but you will fail as I do. Dive as we may, we cannot reach the depths of this abyss of woe and shame! Climb as we may, these storm-swept hills of agony are still above us.

II. Removing the curtain, again, from this sorrowful spectacle, I see here a SOLEMN WARNING which speaks softly and meltingly to us out of the spectacle of sorrow. Do you ask me what is that warning? It is a warning against our ever committing the same crime as the soldiers did. “The same?” you ask, “why, we should never plat a crown of thorns for that dear head.” I pray you never may. But there are many who have done so and are doing it! Those are guilty of this crime who, as these soldiers did, *deny His claims*. Busy are the wise men of this world at this very time all over the world—busy in gathering thorns and twisting them—that they may afflict the Lord's Anointed. Some of them cry, “Yes, He was a good Man, but not the Son of God!”

Others even deny His superlative excellence in life and teaching. They quibble at His perfection and imagine flaws where none exist. Never are they happier than when impugning His Character. I may be addressing some avowed infidel here, some skeptic as to the Redeemer's Person and Doctrine—and I charge him with crowning the Christ of God with thorns every time he invents bitter charges against the Lord Jesus and utters railing words against His cause and His people! Your denial of His claims, and especially your ridicule of them, is a repetition of the unhappy scene before us. There are some who ply all their wit and tax their utmost skill for nothing else but to discover discrepancies in the Gospel narratives, or to conjure up differences between their supposed scientific discoveries and the declarations of the Word of God. Full often have they torn their own hands in weaving crowns of thorns for Him and I fear, as the result of their displays of scientific research after briars with which to afflict the Lover of mankind, some of them will have to lie upon a *bed* of thorns when they come to die.

It will be well if they have not to lie on worse than thorns forever when Christ shall come to judge them and condemn them and cast them into the Lake of Fire for all their impieties concerning Him. Oh, that they would cease this useless and malicious trade of weaving crowns of thorns for Him who is the world's only hope, whose religion is the lone star

that gilds the midnight of human sorrow and guides mortal man to the port of peace! Even for the temporal benefits of Christianity the good Jesus should be treated with respect. He has emancipated the slave and uplifted the downtrodden! His Gospel is the charter of liberty, the scourge of tyrants and the death of priests! Spread it and you spread peace, freedom, order, love and joy! He is the greatest of philanthropists, the truest Friend of man—why, then, array yourselves against Him—you who talk of progress and enlightenment? If men did but know Him, they would crown Him with diadems of reverent love more precious than the pearls of India, for His reign will usher in the golden age. Even now it softens the rigor of the present, as it has removed the miseries of the past. It is an ill business, this carping and quibbling, and I beseech those engaged in it to cease their ungenerous labors, unworthy of rational beings and destructive to their immortal souls!

This crowning with thorns is worked in another fashion by *hypocritical professions of allegiance to Him*. These soldiers put a crown on Christ's head, but they did not mean that He should be king. They put a scepter in His hand, but it was not the substantial ivory rod which signifies real power—it was only a weak and slender reed. Therein they remind us that Christ is mocked by insincere professors. O you who love Him not in your inmost souls, you are those who mock Him! But you say, "Wherein have I failed to crown Him? Did I not join the Church? Have I not said that I am a Believer?" On, but if your *hearts* are not right within you, you have only crowned Him with thorns! If you have not given Him your very soul, you have, in awful mockery, thrust a scepter of reed into His hand! Your very *religion* mocks Him! Your lying professions mock Him!

Who has required this at your hands, to tread His courts? You insult Him at His table! You insult Him on your knees! How can you say you love Him, when your hearts are not with Him? If you have never believed in Him and repented of sin. If you have never yielded obedience to His commands. If you do not acknowledge Him in your daily life to be both Lord and King, I charge you, lay down the profession which is so dishonoring to Him! If He is God, serve Him! If He is King, obey Him! If He is neither, then do not profess to be Christians! Be honest and bring no crown if you do not accept Him as King! What need, again, to insult Him with nominal dominion, mimic homage and pretended service? O you hypocrites! Consider your ways, lest soon the Lord whom you provoke should ease Him of His adversaries!

In a measure the same thing may be done by those who are sincere, but through lack of watchfulness *walk so as to dishonor their profession*. Here, if I speak rightly, I shall compel every one of you to confess it in your spirits that you stand condemned—for every time that we act according to our sinful flesh we crown the Savior's head with thorns. Which of us has not done this? Dear Head, every hair of which is more precious than fine gold, when we gave our hearts to You we thought we should always adore You! We thought that our whole lives would be one long Psalm, praising and blessing and crowning You!

Alas, how far have we fallen short of our own ideals? We have hedged You about with the briers of our sin. We have been betrayed into angry tempers so that we have spoken unadvisedly with our lips. Or we have been worldly and loved that which You abhor, or we have yielded to our passions and indulged our evil desires. Our vanities, follies, forgetfulness, omissions and offenses have set upon Your head a coronet of dishonor—and we tremble to think of it! Oh, cruel hearts and hands to have so maltreated the Well-Beloved, whom it should have been our daily care to glorify!

Do I speak to any backslider whose open sin has dishonored the Cross of Christ? I fear I must be addressing some who once had a name to live, but now are numbered with the dead in sin! Surely if there is a spark of Divine Grace in you, what I am now saying must cut you to the quick and act like salt upon a raw wound to make your very soul to smart! Do not your ears tingle as I accuse you of deliberate acts of inconsistency which have twisted a thorny crown for our dear Master's head? It is assuredly so, for you have opened the mouths of blasphemers, taught gainsayers to revile Him, grieved the generation of His people and made many to stumble! Ungodly men have laid your faults at the door of the innocent Savior—they have said—"This is Your religion."

You have grown the thorns, but He has had to wear them! *We* call your offenses inconsistencies, but worldly men regard them as the fruit of Christianity and condemn the Vine because of our sour clusters! They charge the holy Jesus with the faults of His erring followers. Dear Friends, is there not room to look at home in the case of each one of us? As we do so, let us come with the sorrowful and loving penitent and wash His dear feet with tears of repentance because we have crowned His head with thorns. Thus our thorn-crowned Lord and Master stands before us as a sorrowful spectacle, conveying to us a solemn warning.

III. Lifting the veil again, in the Person of our tortured and insulted Lord we see TRIUMPHANT ENDURANCE. He could not be conquered! He was victorious even in the hour of deepest shame—

*“He with unflinching heart
Bore all disgrace and shame,
And mid the keenest smart
Loved on, yes loved the same.”*

He was bearing at that moment, first, *the substitutionary griefs* which were due to Him because He stood in our place and from bearing them He did not turn aside. We were sinners and the reward of sin is pain and death—therefore *He* bore the chastisement of our peace.

He was enduring, at that time, what *we* ought to have endured—and He was draining the cup which Justice had mingled for us. Did He start back from it? Oh, no! When He first came to drink of that wormwood and gall in the Garden, He put it to His lips and the draught seemed, for an instant, to stagger even His strong spirit. His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. He was like one demented, tossed to and fro with inward agony. “My Father,” He said, “if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.” Three times did He utter that prayer, while every portion of His Manhood was the battlefield of legions of griefs! His soul rushed out at every pore to find a vent for its swelling woes! His whole body became covered with gory sweat.

After that tremendous struggle, the strength of Love mastered the weakness of Manhood—He put that cup to His lips and never shrank—He drank right on till not a drop was left! And now the cup of wrath is empty—no trace of the terrible wine of the wrath of God can be found within it! At one tremendous draught of love the Lord drank destruction dry, forever, for all His people. “Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes, rather, that has risen again.” And “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”

Now, surely, endurance had reached a very high point when our Master was made to endure the painful mockery which our text describes, yet He quailed not, nor removed from His settled purpose. He had undertaken and He would go through with it. Look at Him and see, there, a miracle of patient endurance of griefs which would have sent a world to Hell had He not borne them on our behalf! Besides the shame and suffering due for sin, with which it pleased the Father to bruise Him, He was enduring *a superfluity of malice from the hate of men*. Why did men need to concentrate all their scorn and cruelty into His execution? Was it not enough that He must die? Did it give pleasure to their iron hearts to rack His tender sensibilities? Why these inventions for deepening his woe?

Had any of *us* been thus derided we should have resented it. There is not a man or woman here who could have been silent under such indignities! But Jesus sat in Omnipotence of patience possessing His soul right royally. Glorious Pattern of patience, we adore You as we see how malice could not conquer Your almighty love! The pain which He had endured from the scourges caused Him to throb with exquisite anguish—but we read neither of tears nor groans—much less of angry complaints or revengeful threats. He does not seek pity, or make one appeal for leniency. He does not ask why they torture or why they mock. Brave Witness! Courageous Martyr! Suffering exquisitely, You also suffered calmly! Such a perfect frame as His—His body being conceived without sin—He must have been capable of tortures which our bodies, corrupted by sin, cannot feel.

His delicate purity felt a horror of ribald jests which our more hardened spirits cannot estimate! Yet Jesus bore all as only the Son of God could bear it. They might heap on the load as they would—He would only put forth more endurance and bear it all— He would not shrink or complain. I venture to suggest that such was the picture of patience which our blessed Lord exhibited that it may have moved even some of the soldiers, themselves. Has it ever occurred to you to ask how Matthew came to know all about that mockery? Matthew was not there! Mark, also, gives an account of it, but he would not have been tolerated in the guard room. The Praetorians were far too proud and rough to tolerate Jews, much less disciples of Jesus, in their common hall.

Since there could have been nobody there except the soldiers themselves, it is well to inquire—Who told this tale? It must have been an eyewitness. May it not have been that centurion who in the same chapter is reported to have said, “Certainly this was the Son of God”? May not that scene, as well as the Lord’s death, have led him to that conclusion? We do not know, but this much is very evident—the story must have been told by an eyewitness, and also by one who sympathized with the Sufferer—for to my ears it does not read like the description of an unconcerned spectator. I should

not wonder—I would almost venture to assert—that our Lord’s marred, but patient visage, preached such a sermon that one, at least, who gazed upon it felt its mysterious power!

Certainly at least *one* felt that such patience was more than human—and accepted the thorn-crowned Savior as his Lord and his King! This I do know, that if you and I want to conquer human hearts for Jesus, we, too, must be patient. And if, when they ridicule and persecute us, we can but endure without repining or retaliation, we shall exercise an influence which even the most brutal will feel—and to which chosen minds will submit themselves.

IV. Drawing up the veil again, I think we have before us, in the fourth place, in the Person of the triumphant Sufferer, a SACRED MEDICINE. I can only hint at the diseases which it will cure. These blood-sprinkled thorns are plants of renown, precious in heavenly surgery if they are rightly used. Take but a thorn out of this crown and use it as a lancet, and it will let out the hot blood of passion and abate the fever of pride! It is a wonderful remedy for swelling flesh and grievous boils of sin. He who sees Jesus crowned with thorns will loathe to look on self, except it be through tears of contrition. This thorn at the breast will make men sing, but not with notes of self-congratulation—the notes will be those of a dove moaning for her mate.

Gideon taught the men of Buccoth with thorns, but the lessons were not so salutary as those which we learn from the thorns of Jesus. The sacred medicine which the good Physician brings to us in His thorny crown acts as a tonic and strengthens us to endure, without depression, whatever shame or loss His service may bring upon us—

*“Who defeats my fiercest foes?
Who consoles my saddest woes?
Who revives my fainting heart,
Healing all its hidden smart?
Jesus crowned with thorns.”*

When you begin to serve God and for His sake endeavor to benefit your fellow mortals, do not expect any reward from men, except to be misunderstood, suspected and abused. The best men in the world are usually the worst spoken of. An evil world cannot speak well of holy lives. The sweetest fruit is most pecked at by the birds. The mountain nearest Heaven is most beaten by the storms—and the loveliest character is the most assailed. Those whom you would save will not thank you for your anxiety, but blame you for your interference.

If you rebuke their sins they will frequently resent your warnings. If you invite them to Jesus, they will make light of your entreaties. Are you prepared for this? If not, consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest you become weary and faint in your minds. If you succeed in bringing many to Christ, you must not reckon upon universal honor—you will be charged with self-seeking, popularity-hunting, or some such crime—you will be misrepresented, belied, caricatured and counted as a fool or a knave by the ungodly world. The probabilities are that the crown you will win in this world, if you serve God, will contain more spikes than sapphires, more briers than beryls! When it is put upon your head, pray for Divine Grace to wear it right gladly, counting it all joy to be like your Lord.

Say in your heart, “I feel no dishonor in this dishonor. Men may impute shameful things to me, but I am not ashamed. They may degrade me, but I am not degraded. They may cast contempt upon me, but I am not contemptible.” The Master of the house was called Beelzebub and spit upon—they cannot do worse to His household—therefore we scorn their scorn! Thus are we nerved to patience by the patience of the despised Nazarene. The thorn crown is also a remedy for discontent and affliction. When enduring bodily pain we are apt to wince and fret, but if we remember Jesus crowned with thorns, we say—

*“His way was much rougher and darker than mine.
Did Christ my Lord suffer, and shall I repine?”*

And so our complaints grow dumb—for very shame we dare not compare our maladies with His woes! Resignation is learned at Jesus’ feet when we see our great Exemplar made perfect through suffering. The thorn crown is a cure for care. We would cheerfully wear any array which our Lord may prepare for us, but it is a great folly to plat needless thorn crowns for ourselves. Yet I have seen some who are, I hope, true Believers, take much trouble to trouble themselves and labor to increase their own labors.

They hasten to be rich—they fret, they toil, they worry and torment themselves to load themselves with the burden of wealth—they wound themselves to wear the thorny crown of worldly greatness! Many are the ways of making rods for our own backs. I have known mothers make thorn crowns out of their children whom they could not trust with God—

they have been worn with family anxieties when they might have rejoiced in God. I have known others make thorn crowns out of silly fears for which there were no grounds, whatever—but they seemed ambitious to be fretful, eager to prick themselves with briars. O Believer, say to yourself, “My Lord wore my crown of thorns for me! Why should I wear it, too?”

He took our griefs and carried our sorrows that we might be a happy people and be able to obey the command, “Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” Ours is the crown of lovingkindness and tender mercies—and we wear it when we cast all our cares on Him who cares for us. That thorn crown cures us of desire for the vainglorious of the world! It dims all human pomp and glory till it turns to smoke! Could we fetch, here, the Pope’s triple crown, or the imperial diadem of Germany, or the regalia of the Czar of All the Russias—none of them can compare with Jesus’ crown of thorns! Let us set some great one on his throne and see how little he looks when Jesus sits beside him! What is there kingly in being able to tax men and live upon their labors, giving little in return? The most royal thing is to lay them all under obligations to our disinterested love and be the fountain of blessing to them.

Oh, it takes the glitter from your gold, the luster from your gems and the beauty from all your dainty gewgaws to see that no imperial purple can equal the glory of His blood—no gems can rival His thorns! Show and parade cease to attract the soul when once the superlative excellencies of the dying Savior have been discerned by the enlightened eyes! Who seeks for ease when he has seen the Lord Christ? If Christ wears a crown of thorns, shall we covet a crown of laurel? Even the fierce Crusader, when he entered into Jerusalem and was elected king, had sense enough to say, “I will not wear a crown of gold in the same city where my Savior wore a crown of thorns.”

Why should we desire, like feather-bed soldiers, to have everything arranged for our ease and pleasure? Why this reclining upon couches when Jesus hangs on the Cross? Why this soft raiment when He is naked? Why these luxuries when He is treated barbarously? Thus the crown of thorns cures us, at once, of the vainglory of the world and of our own selfish love of ease. The world’s minstrel may cry, “Ho, boy, come here and crown me with rose buds!” But the pleasure seeker’s request is not for us. For us neither delights of the flesh nor the pride of life can have charms while the Man of Sorrows is in view. For us it remains to suffer and to labor till the King shall bid us share His rest.

V. I must notice, in the fifth place, that there is before us a MYSTIC CORONATION. Bear with my many divisions. The coronation of Christ with thorns was symbolical and had great meaning in it, for, first, it was to Him *a triumphal crown*. Christ had fought with sin from the day when He first stood foot to foot with it in the wilderness, up to the time when He entered Pilate’s Hall—and He had conquered it. As a witness that He had gained the victory, behold sin’s crown seized as a trophy! What was the crown of sin? Thorns. These sprang from the curse. “Thorns, also, and thistles shall it bring forth to you,” was the coronation of sin—and now Christ has taken away its crown and put it on His own head.

He has spoiled sin of its richest regalia and He wears it Himself. Glorious Champion, all hail! What if I say that the thorns constituted a mural crown? Paradise was set round with a hedge of thorns so sharp that none could enter it, but our Champion leaped, first, upon the bristling rampart and bore the blood-red banner of His Cross into the heart of that better new Eden which He won for us—never to be lost again. Jesus wears the mural chaplet which denotes that He has opened Paradise. It was a wrestler’s crown He wore, for He wrestled not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and He overthrew His foe. It was a racer’s crown He wore, for He had run with the mighty and outstripped them in the race. He had well-near finished His course and had but a step or two more to take to reach the goal. Here is a marvelous field for enlargement—and we must stop at once lest we go too far! It was a crown rich with glory despite the shame which was intended by it.

We see in Jesus the Monarch of the realms of misery, the Chief among ten thousand sufferers. Never say, “I am a great sufferer.” What are our griefs compared with His? As the poet stood upon the Palatine Mount and thought of Rome’s dire ruin, he exclaimed, “What are our woes and sufferings?” Even so I ask, What are our shallow griefs compared with the infinite sorrows of Immanuel? Well may we “control in our close breasts our petty misery.” Jesus is, moreover, the Prince of Martyrs. He leads the van among the noble army of suffering witnesses and confessors of the Truth of God. Though they died at the stake, or pined in dungeons, or were cast to wild beasts—none of them claim the first rank—He, the faithful and the true Witness with the thorn crown and the Cross, stands at the head of them all!

It may never be our lot to join the august band, but if there is an honor for which we might legitimately envy saints of former times, it is this—that they were born in those brave days when the ruby crown was within human grasp—and when the supreme sacrifice might have been made! We are cowards, indeed, if in these softer days we are ashamed to confess our Master and are afraid of a little scorn, or tremble at the criticisms of the would-be wise. Rather let us follow the Lamb where ever He goes, content to wear His crown of thorns that we may, in His kingdom, behold His Glory!

VI. The last word is this. In the thorn crown I see a MIGHTY STIMULUS. A mighty stimulus to what? Why, first, to fervent love of Him. Can you see Him crowned with thorns and not be drawn to Him? I think if He could come among us this morning and we could see Him, there would be a loving press around Him to touch the hem of His garment or to kiss His feet. Savior, You are very precious to us! Dearest of all the names above, my Savior and my God, You are always glorious, but in these eyes You are never more lovely than when arrayed in shameful mockery. The Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon—both in one is He, fair in the perfection of His Character—and blood-red in the greatness of His sufferings. Worship Him! Adore Him! Bless Him! And let your voices sing, “Worthy the Lamb.”

This sight is a stimulus, next, to *repentance*. Did our sins put thorns around His head? Oh, my poor fallen Nature, I will scourge you for scourging Him and make you feel the thorns for causing Him to endure them! What? Can you see your Master put to such shame and yet hold truce or parley with the sins which pierced Him? It cannot be! Let us declare before God our soul’s keen grief that we should make the Savior suffer so! Then let us pray for Grace to hedge our lives around with thorns that from this very day sin may not approach us.

I thought, this day, of how often I have seen the blackthorn growing in the hedge all bristling with a thousand prickles, but right in the center of the bush have I seen the pretty nest of a little bird. Why did the creature place its habitation there? Because the thorns become a protection to it and shelter it from harm. As I meditated, last night, upon this blessed subject, I thought I would bid you build your nests within the thorns of Christ. It is a safe place for sinners! Neither Satan, sin, nor Death can reach you there. Gaze on your Savior’s sufferings and you will see sin atoned for. Fly into His wounds! Fly, you timid, trembling Doves! There is no resting place so safe for you! Build your nests, I say again, among these thorns, and when you have done so, and trusted Jesus, and counted Him to be All in All to you, then come and crown His sacred head with other crowns!

What glory does He deserve? What is good enough for Him? If we could take all the precious things from all the treasuries of monarchs, they would not be worthy to be pebbles beneath His feet! If we could bring Him all the scepters, miters, tiaras, diadems and all other pomp on earth, they would be altogether unworthy to be thrown in the dust before Him! With what shall we crown Him? Come, let us weave our praises together and set our tears for pearls—our love for gold—they will sparkle like so many diamonds in His esteem, for He loves repentance and He loves faith. Let us make a wreath, this morning, with our praises, and crown Him as the Laureate of Grace! This day on which He rose from the dead, let us extol Him! Oh, for Grace to do it in the heart! And then in the life! And then with the tongue, that we may praise Him forever who bowed His head in shame for us!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew 27:11-54.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—336, 282, 275, 417 (vs. 1 & 4).

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