

34 - By-Path Meadow

Now I beheld in my dream, that they had not journeyed far but the river and the way for a time parted. At which they were not a little sorry; yet they durst not go out of the way. Now the way from the river was rough, and their feet tender by reason of their travels; so the souls of the pilgrims were much discouraged because of the way (#Nu 21:4): wherefore, still as they went on, they wished for a better way. Now a little before them, there was on the left hand of the road a meadow, and a stile to go over into it; and that meadow is called "By-path Meadow." Then said CHRISTIAN to his fellow, "If this meadow lies along by our wayside, let us go over into it." Then he went to the stile to see; and behold a path lay along by the way on the other side of the fence. "'Tis according to my wish," said CHRISTIAN; "here is the easiest going; come, good HOPEFUL, and let us go over."

Hope. But how if this path should lead us out of the way?

Chr. "That's not like," said the other; "look, doth it not go along by the wayside?" So HOPEFUL, being persuaded by his fellow, went after him over the stile. When they were going over, and were got into the path, they found it very easy for their feet; and withal, they looking before them, espied a man walking as they did (and his name was VAIN-CONFIDENCE.); so they called after him, and asked him whither that way led? He said, "To the Celestial Gate." "Look," said CHRISTIAN, "did not I tell you so? By this you may see we are right." So they followed; and he went before them. But behold, the night came on, and it grew very dark; so that they that were behind lost the sight of him that went before.

He therefore that went before (VAIN-CONFIDENCE by name), not seeing the way before him, fell into a deep pit (#Isa 9:16), which was on purpose there made by the prince of those grounds, to catch vain-glorious fools withal, and was dashed in pieces with his fall.

Now CHRISTIAN and his fellow heard him fall. So they called, to know the matter; but there was none to answer—only they heard a groaning. Then said HOPEFUL, "Where are we now?" Then was his fellow silent, as mistrusting that he had led him out of the way. And now it began to rain, and thunder, and lighten in a dreadful manner; and the water rose suddenly.

Then HOPEFUL groaned in himself, saying, "Oh that I had kept on my way !"

Chr. Who could have thought that this path should have led us out of the way!

Hope. I was afraid of it at the very first; and therefore gave you that gentle caution. I would have spoken plainer, but that you are older than I.

Chr. Good brother, be not offended; I am sorry I have brought thee out of the way, and that I have put thee into such imminent danger. Pray, my brother, forgive me; I did not do it of an evil intent.

Hope. Be comforted, my brother, for I forgive thee; and believe, too, that this shall be for our good.

Chr. I am glad I have with me a merciful brother. But we must not stand thus; let us try to go back again.

Hope. But, good brother, let me go before.

Chr. No, if you please, let me go first; that if there be any danger, I may be first therein: because by my means we are both gone out of the way.

Hope. "No," said HOPEFUL, "you shall not go first; for your mind being troubled, may lead you out of the way again." Then, for their encouragement, they heard the voice of one saying, "Set thine heart toward the highway, even the way that thou wentest; turn again" (#Jer 31:21). But by this time the waters were greatly risen; by reason of which the way of going back was very dangerous. (Then I thought that it is easier going out of the way when we are in, than going in when we are out.) Yet they adventured to go back; but it was so dark, and the flood was so high, that in their going back, they had like to have been drowned nine or ten times.

Nu 21:4 Isa 9:16 Jer 31:21

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.” (Nu 21:4 NKJV)

“For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err, And *those who are* led by them are destroyed.” (Isa 9:16 NKJV)

“Set up signposts, Make landmarks; Set your heart toward the highway, The way in *which* you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, Turn back to these your cities.” (Jer 31:21 NKJV)