

FORWARD MOVEMENT CLASSICS

FOR  
THOSE  
*Who Mourn*



**Forward Movement Classics:** *Now in its forty-fourth printing, this pamphlet was first published by Forward Movement in 1944 and originally written by the Rev. G. Carleton Barnwell. His daughter was killed in a car accident on her way to school. Although some of the language differs from modern-day usage, its message continues to provide consolation and comfort to Forward Movement readers today.*

## The Universality of Death

Your life running year after year along its accustomed course, smoothly and serenely, tends to develop in you a sense of immunity to tragedy and death. Thousands starve from the famine in Ethiopia and thousands die in the earthquake in Iran—but these places are far away. Your neighbor down the street dies and you send flowers. You feel sorry for his family, but you continue with your work and play. These things do not happen to you.

Suddenly the bottom drops out of *your* world. It is as sudden and unexpected as if a ship struck a rock in the calm of mid-ocean. A crash and sudden death. A deadly germ gets into the blood stream, and all the skill of modern science is helpless to avert the end. The

stricken father loses his faith. The heartbroken mother cries out, "Why did this happen to us?"

It is hard to answer such a question to the satisfaction and comfort of those who ask it, because at such a time those who ask it are not rational. It is difficult for the mind that is shocked beyond comprehension to be reasonable. The breaking heart wants none of your logic. It wants comfort and peace. Above all, it wants to turn back the page, to recall the life that has gone—and this cannot be. Probably the real difficulty lies in the fact that we have never realized how true are the familiar words, "In the midst of life we are in death" (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 484). Those words were written not to comfort us, but to prepare us for this very situation. We have always accepted their truth in regard to others but have never quite faced them as true for ourselves. Yet in all gentleness, in all sympathy and love, there can be but one answer to such a question: "Why shouldn't it happen to you as well as your neighbor down the street?"

Death is no respecter of persons. It strikes here, it strikes there. It comes as the result of carelessness, unavoidable accidents, disease, or even over-carefulness. Sometimes, we cannot

tell why it comes. It comes at last to us all, to the good and the bad, to the saint and the sinner. To ask, "What have I done to deserve this?" implies that no doubt your neighbor down the way did something to deserve his sorrow. Worse still, it is a reflection upon the goodness and fairness of God, a thing we would not suggest in our more rational moments.

Death comes to you and yours as it has come to every other—it *is inevitable*. It may come upon you as a thief in the night, or it may approach slowly and after ample warning. It may come early in life, or after many years of happiness. But it *will* come. The only way to escape it is never to be born. Acknowledging this truth will not make death a burden easier to bear. It is simply one of the inescapable facts of life which we must learn to face. Let us be fair with God. We know God is fair with us. What right do we have to hope to avoid what we know to be God's plan for all of us? If we can make this adjustment now, it will help us when the real test comes.

## The Naturalness of Death

Much of our horror of death comes from the feeling (even though it may never be expressed)