

## Falling in Faith and Hope



Autumn in the thin place is a glorious experience of nature's glory and the director's presence. Today I watched leaves fall softly. Sunlit golden whispers kissed the grasses' comforting hope. Through the doorway at the edge of the wood I saw careless breezes brush a whole palette of colours across a green canvas. The gentle movements of air made last minute touches, aware that, winter-hungry winds may soon make their assault. Autumn is truly a riot of

spectacular hues. I like to think of this season as 'The Fall'. Fall changes the angle of appreciation. It speaks of movement – a season of colour in motion.

I am told that every leaf on every tree is unique, and I am sure he will say that just as no bird falls unnoticed by him, each leaf will have its personal destiny. I watch the tumbling, floating forms, knowing that each will fall in its own special way, determined by its own peculiar shape and weight and dimensions. Some will be torn from their anchorage by cruel tempests, to be flung into distant, unknown territory beyond the edge of the wood. Some will fall heavy with the weight of morning dew. Others will hold on tenaciously until, at last, an icy wind snatches them from their home; but most will dance, cavorting gracefully in the breeze, until they lay a russet carpet on the floor of Autumn's ballroom. There is contentment in their graceful exit, an acceptance that frost, rain and sunshine will crumble them into dust as food to give back life into the trees.

Among the falling leaves he caused me to remember Jim. Jim had been back in hospital for a while. I missed our weekly walks around the block. It was not far, but it took an hour. Jim had suffered a stroke and was finding it hard learning to walk again. I sensed that, more than the physical movement, it was a lack of confidence which ailed him. When I called to see him the morning after his return home, I knew immediately he had changed. His welcoming smile had returned with him as had his old firm handclasp. There was a new assurance in the way he stood, no longer grasping the chair-back for support. I had to ask what had happened. He beamed at me. *'I saw a new physiotherapist when I was in hospital this time,'* he replied. *'She taught me how to fall! I go down gracefully so I am able to get myself up again.'*

That was many years ago and since then I have travelled on into my own era which they call *life's Autumn* – or is it Fall? Watching the dance of the autumn leaves the Lord again assured me that in everything there may be a greater purpose. There are times when God raises me up. There are times when it seems he lets me fall. Times when it seems he cruelly tears me from my complacent satisfaction; but all is well if only I learn to fall gracefully, trusting myself to be carried by his Spirit in this dance of life. I recollected how many

times God has made my use of 'failures' – of mine, of those with whom I have sometimes shared the experience, and many more of whom I have read – to give a greater maturity of faith. Falling and rising, being helped by him, are an essential part of the life of faith. In learning our weakness, we discover our need to depend on the Father's grace.

He brought me one more picture memory among the leaves. It was inspired by the radiant sunlight – a field in Gambia where women wielded hoes, breaking up crusted earth and anthills ready for planting a new groundnut crop. Several of the workers carried babies carefully wrapped on their backs. A companion explained – *The children will be put down soon or they'll never learn to walk!* The Fall is a putting down time for the leaves. They let go the security of the tree which they have mutually nourished in order to return the life which was loaned them for a short while of growth and glory.

I offered my simple prayer beneath a half-dressed horse chestnut - *'teach me to fall gracefully – to be broken in penitence, suffering or ageing, in such a way as my relinquishing may give hope and inspiration to all whose lives touch mine.'*