Afflictions and Consolations

Notes of an Address on the First Epistle of Peter

By J. G. B. Aug., 1851.

(extracted from *The Northern Witness, 1880*)

There are three things in this epistle: 1st, the apostle contemplates the saint in times of various troubles; 2ndly, the mind with which the trouble should be passed through; and 3rdly, the consolations which God provides for such a time. There is nothing very remarkable in the bearing of it; but so much the more needed by the soul very often; — it is homely, practical. Godly power marks the whole of the epistle.

Observe he addresses it to "strangers scattered throughout Pontus," etc. (1 Peter 1: 1.) Now the very salutation intimates that things are not right with them here — "scattered strangers!" as though they had no certain dwelling-place, like their Master. It is not said, "an embodied church," with all its ceremonies and ordinances; but he addresses himself to "scattered strangers." This alone puts the saint into a place of suffering — they had no rest for the sole of their foot — they are "strangers," scattered to and fro.

Now the first trial that he contemplates in the first chapter, is *the trial of faith* (1 Peter 1: 5-13). The form of trial here is that dealing of God's hand with you, which has its direct business with your faith — whose office and property it is to exercise the soul in the principles of faith. He does not define what it may be — it may be a circumstance or disappointment; but something, the direct character of which is, to link the heart with the objects of faith. And it is very beautiful, in the wisdom of the Spirit, to leave it undefined, the only thing that marks it being this — it is the trial of faith. And we all know it. If you meet with a disappointment or loss, what is the support under it? Why, this "looking forward." It may cause present heaviness; but the support which God provides for this trial of faith is, "the looking forward;" that in the day of the appearing of Christ, this faith, which has been burnished by the fire, shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory.

Now just look at those three things — here is the trial of faith — the exercise of heart, fitted to link it with eternity and heaven — the Lord comforting the heart under such a trial by directing it onward to the appearing of Jesus, and the Lord counselling the heart how to behave itself under the trial — "Gird up the loins" — don't be faint-hearted — don't yield — "be ye sober," and hope — hope still!

How simple is this! The character of the trial is undefined; and whatever cross or accident meets you in your path, you may put it down — happily put it down to the account of this — it is designed by your heavenly Father to try your faith. No matter how it may happen. The Spirit of God does not tell you to reason about it; but tells you to submit under it, and rejoice in the hope to which it is all leading.

In the 1 Peter 2, you find a very well defined trial. There is comfort provided, and duty prescribed in the midst of it. Now read with me from 1 Peter 1: 18 to 1 Peter 1: 21 — "Servants be subject," etc. Now here there is a very well defined suffering or trial. It is not left unexpressed as in the previous chapter, but here is a suffering that is commonly known in human life, and the more we ought to value it. Here is a suffering brought from the ill usage and treatment of others — a servant suffering under the hand of a froward master. Well, it may be a neighbour suffering under the hand of an evil-minded neighbour or relative. You may put it in various forms — (the Spirit need not illustrate every case). But here we have a servant enduring the frowardness of an evil-minded master. Now here is a well-understood, and oft-experienced sorrow in this life. It is but the trial of faith — Oh, how one admires

this! There is comfort in showing this, that the Spirit of God knows your little secret frettings, and that there are none of them, however small or ordinary, outside His sympathy. Well, how does He tell them to behave themselves? Beautifully. In the first place, for their great comfort, He says — "All this secret fretting foes on under the eye of God with deep acceptableness." Oh, what a comfort this is! Suppose a poor, silent, suffering servant, meeting the ill nature of his master, why there he is in such a condition; but all day long the eye of God is resting on his behaviour with delight and complacency. That is the ingredient in the scene which faith apprehends. Nature will feel the suffering; but faith apprehends the unseen eye of God waiting upon the patient endurance of the servant with complacency.

A servant, suffering all the day long from the frowardness of an evil master, was the life of Jesus. He was reviled, and ill-treated by an apostate world, yet He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judgeth righteously. Now does not the apostle speak very sweetly to us there? He comes, and looks at them in the most common scene of human life, and he dignifies it; the most common material in human life he dignifies with the sympathies of Christ, and hen dignifies with the complacency of God Himself. Can anything be more precious than that? Again, I say, nothing more common-place, and that is what makes it so delightful.

Now look at the 3rd chapter. You get another suffering, but in a different form. In the 14th verse — "If ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye," etc. (1 Peter 3: 14-22). Now here is a new kind of suffering — "for righteousness sake;" that is, you go on in a path of integrity — a path of uprightness — maintaining that at all cost; you are faithful to the Lord, and this brings you into suffering. Now this is another kind of trial. And how does the Spirit of God comfort us under that? Why He tells us, beloved, to "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts" — to remember Christ just in the same condition; and He points us to the days of Noah. Noah for a long period (120 years) — what was he doing then? He was preparing the ark. He looked to be the fool of his generation — the very object of scorn — that he should occupy morning and evening, day after day, and year after year preparing an ark — preparing a ship for dry ground! It was utter folly. Well, it was the path that God had laid out for him, and, whatever it might have cost him, he had God with him. He "sanctified the Lord God in his heart;" and not only that, beloved; not only had he communion, but he had this, the answer of a good conscience towards God; not only was he upright, but he was making that ark which was every moment to him the witness of his eternal safety. He knew it — he knew that the waters were coming — that a day of judgment was before him; but every stroke of his hammer went as a blessed witness to his soul, that he should be safe in that day of trial. Well, so the Spirit of God tells us, we are to pass through the trial, having "the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

There is a beautiful link between Noah preparing the ark, and what ought to be the condition of your soul. You should have a good conscience — not a good moral conscience, but a *freed* conscience. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives you a good conscience towards God — it discharges your conscience from all guilt, and delivers it from all fear of a coming judgment. Just as Noah, every stroke of his hammer told him he would be safe in the day of judgment; so you ought to go on in the trials of righteousness which the maintenance of a good conscience may bring, in the support of a good conscience *towards God*. You must not give up a good moral conscience; let the exercise of righteousness in the world cost you what suffering it may, you must not give up righteousness; but your support in this path is this, that between you and God, all is settled for eternity — the resurrection of Jesus Christ has sealed upon your conscience eternal peace.

Now what a beautiful picture is this of the suffering saint! If it be, as we have seen, the trial of his faith — if it be a servant, enduring all the day long the ill-treatment of a froward master — or here, if, at the cost of everything, he maintains the righteousness and uprightness of his walk, and thus

maintains a good conscience — his comfort is this, that which poor Noah enjoyed — whenever judgment might come, he was as safe as if he were in heaven.

Well now in 1 Peter 4 you get another kind of sorrow, and that is in the very opening of it. You must count upon the trial, not of righteousness, but of holiness. The former was given in the 3rd chapter; the trial of holiness in given in the opening of the 4th. What is the difference? Righteousness is uprightness of conduct outside, in the world; holiness is the pure and chaste behaviour, in your own members within. Well that is put to trial in this world too — one without, and the other within. As you have to fight the battle of holiness within, so you have to fight the battle of righteousness without. You are to fight the fight of holiness in your own members, as you are to fight the fight of righteousness in the course of the world. And what is your comfort? Why this, that you shall soon give an account to Him that is ready to judge quick and dead; and remember, that while you are fighting this fight of holiness, you are living your time, not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. There is your comfort. If we had any bit of heart at all, it would be a great support to us to know that God is with us.

In the progress of the 4th chapter, you find another form of suffering, and that is what we call "*martyr suffering*." Not suffering from the trial of faith, or from the frowardness of an evil master, from a relation, or nearest of kin, nor the suffering for righteousness, nor the trial of holiness in the members, but more characteristically what we call martyr-suffering. Well, how does he speak to us under that? "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial. . . . . But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings," etc. (1 Peter 4: 12, 13).

Oh, with what a cheerful mind the Spirit of God speaks! Supposing we were this moment dragged off to the prison — to meet the stake, like hundreds before us — see with what a cheerful spirit the Holy Ghost would put us on the journey! "Think it not strange," says He; for when you are taking the journey to the prison or the stake, you are only on the journey with the Saviour to Calvary. You and I may not be prepared for it, but we must not measure the Spirit's thoughts by our attainments. It is but a little pain for a while, when His glory shall appear. "Ye may be glad," etc., 1 Peter 4: 13, 14. Now mark the current of the cheerful spirit here, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you," etc. 1 Peter 4: 13, 14. Happy thing it is, that when the martyr is on his way to death, you should see the Spirit of glory resting upon his head. His persecutions for Christ's sake are the very plattings of the crown upon his brow! It is the blessed Saviour coming and fitting the crown upon his brow. "The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." And again I say, in this, which to nature is the gloomiest we have looked at yet — in the trial of faith, in enduring the ill-treatment of others, we may have human relief; but here, shut up to Christ, with nothing but the gloom of a prison around us, nothing but the fiery stake before the eye — here the glad spirit, the oil of gladness, comes to anoint the spirit richly. And, O beloved! To know that, while even in the dungeon, the hand of God is fitting a crown of glory to the brow! "The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified." We know not what a day may bring forth, but Jesus knows, and He will provide.

Well then, in the last chapter, you find here, at the 6th verse, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5: 6). And here I believe we return very much to the first chapter. We can't tell in what form that "mighty hand" may humble. It may be by removing prop after prop, disappointing one expectation of the heart after another. It may be by terrible ways God may humble you; and what is worst of all, He may appear in the very act to be against you. He may seem to carry Himself so wilfully against your circumstances and your present joys, that the heart will begin to fear lest God should be against us. It is a "mighty hand;" but let that comfort you instead of frightening you. There is a great comfort in this word "mighty." It is not a

"soothing hand;" it is a "mighty hand," that seems set on bruising. Well, what says the Spirit of God? "Humble yourselves" under it, for "He will exalt you." Oh how beautiful! See how roughly Joseph spoke to his brethren. He put them in prison — told the keepers to take charge of them — but in secret he wept; and, in due time, he "exalted" them.

"Casting all your care upon Him," etc. (1 Peter 5: 7). Oh, what comfort there is here! I don't believe that Joseph's tears in secret have a stronger voice in our ears than this, because it tells us, that while the hand is dealing roughly outside, the heart is feeling inside. Well, there it is; and as to the devil's temptation, resist him. Don't "humble yourselves" under that hand — "resist" him, just as did Jesus of old — "Get thee behind me, Satan" — and "the God of all grace, who hath called us," etc., "perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you," (1 Peter 5: 10). Thus the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost carries the apostle Peter, and you, and me, as well as those "strangers," in the hearing of all saints, through every variety of human trial. Whether it is the undefined exercise and trial of faith; whether it is enduring suffering from the frowardness and ill-nature of those that are around us, or from the maintenance of righteousness and a good conscience, or from the struggles between flesh and Spirit, or martyr-suffering; or enduring under the hand of God, or the devil himself — the mighty energy of the Spirit of God carries Peter through them all, to provide strength and consolation. The Lord help our unbelief — take our hearts, and keep them in company with these eternal realities; and then, if it be the stake itself, let us meet it with a cheerful heart; deeply assured of this, that the hand of God is weaving a crown for the brows of His faithful people!