

COMFORTS AND COUNSELS

FOR

THE AFFLICTED.

My dear Friend :—The longer I live, the more am I drawn toward the suffering people of God. I love to weep with those who weep. I find it is better for me to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting. I would not rudely intrude upon your griefs. Your sorrow is so far a sacred thing, that none may curiously pry into its causes or its depths. Yet you are afflicted, perhaps more deeply than others may suspect. “I have a message from God for thee.”

However great your afflictions, they are not to be compared with those of the blessed Saviour. Above all others was he the “Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” “He endured the cross, despising the shame.” He bore the wrath of God against sin. No Christian was ever called to make expiation for sin, by enduring the wrath of God in his own person. But Christ was made a curse for us. The utmost that Christians suffer is the chastisement of their Heavenly Father. Toward his people God uses the rod, but toward his son he used the sword. There never was sorrow like his sorrow. “He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.” “The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” He made “his soul an offering for sin.” So that if we are afflicted, he

was even more afflicted. His soul was sorrowful, even unto death. "It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his Lord." Besides, "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Never forget that Christ's sorrows were greater than yours.

Other servants of God have suffered more than you. You "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." "Others have had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Have you lost your property? Job lost all his in one day; and many of the early Christians "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." The marquis of Vico, in the 16th century, had all his estates confiscated for his love to the word of God, but he said, "Their riches perish with them, who count all the silver and gold in the world worth one hour's communion with Christ." Do men hate you without a cause? So did they all the prophets and apostles. Paul says that he and his coadjutors were despised, reviled, persecuted, defamed, and made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things. Perhaps your friends have been cold to you, and not shown you pity in your affliction. Job's friends did the same, and even accused him of great crimes as the causes of his calamities. His breath was strange even unto his wife. Do you plead the suddenness of your affliction? The Shunamite had very short notice of the death of her son, and Job's afflictions came upon him like an armed man, before he had any warning. To have let you know when, how, and how severely your trials were coming, would have made you suffer them all many times over before they actually reached you. If you are mourning some loved one, called out of time, and are very sad that you have not some evidence, or better evidence that the soul was prepared for the change; remember David lost Absalom under the most painful circumstances, and Job's children were cut down when they were not thinking of death, and had not time even to offer a prayer. Dr.

Thomas Scott tells of a pious lady of eminence, whose son was for his crimes sentenced to death. He seemed dreadfully hardened, even unto the gallows, until he was swung off. Then the rope broke, and he offered a short prayer before he was hung up again. Yet his mother was not heard at any time to utter a murmur. If your friends die, remember that they are in the hands of Him, who is wise, and holy, and just, and good. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" He never errs. He never is unkind. Whatever your afflictions may be, the same or greater are accomplished in your brethren. He who sustains them, can uphold you. In 1850, eight thousand Christians were condemned to death in the island of Madagascar, and forty of them were cruelly executed.

If you deserve no good thing, why should you murmur at a few evil things? Your afflictions are as nothing compared with your sins. Your griefs are not equal to your deserts. It is not of our goodness, it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. "Our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve." "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?" "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" If I deserve eternal death, and receive only temporal chastisement mingled with mercy, is it not base to have hard thoughts of God?

Nor will the afflictions of God's people last always. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Earth has no tempests that always beat. "If your cross is heavy, you have not far to carry it." For what is your life? It is a vapor, a shadow, a tale that is told, a moment, a little moment. It flies like a weaver's shuttle. It travels like one riding post and stopping for nothing. The longest life on earth is but as a dream when one awaketh. Should all your life be sad, it will soon be over. But you "have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." Jacob once said, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." Yet he lived to see that all these things were

for him. Were we not blind, many things, which appeared crooked, would seem straight. Jesus said, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." That is enough for faith to rest upon. Sooner or later, in God's own time, every mystery in his dealings with his sorrowing ones shall be solved. Learn to trust a God that hideth himself. "Trust in the Lord and do good. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. . . . Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him." He who believes God's promises, will not quarrel with his providence.

Let the word of God dwell in you richly. It is all good, but some parts at this time specially suit you. Think of the words of Christ: "Because I live, ye shall live also." "I will not leave you comfortless." "I will send you the Comforter." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Even after his ascension to heaven, he sent many kind messages to his people: "As many as I love, I will rebuke and chasten." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown unto life." "I know thy works." Did he not weep at the grave of Lazarus, and is he not the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?

"It is better to be chastened than to be cast away. As no amount of prosperity can prove one a friend of God, so no amount of adversity can prove one an enemy of God. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." If it was expedient for the disciples that their Lord and Friend (what a friend!) should go away, may it not be best that you should suffer as you do, especially as all your trials are sent in love? For, "the Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor have the children of men." "As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." All our afflictions are the fruit of infinite, eternal, unchangeable love. God may let a sinner go through the world in prosperity, but he never takes a son to glory without adversity.

Some things in the work of sanctification cannot ordinarily be attained without sorrow. If you know nothing of pain on earth, you will hardly be prepared for pleasure in heaven.

No-one now in heaven regrets having gone thither through great tribulation. God "chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Anything is good for us, if it humbles us. It is better to be afflicted and humble, than prosperous and proud. Whatever brings us to the mercy seat is a blessing. Jonah was asleep in the ship, but in the sea he cried by reason of his affliction unto the Lord. That which effectually teaches us the vanity of this world, and leads us to set our hope in God, cannot but be a rich blessing. An hour of sanctified sorrow is better than a thousand years of sinful mirth. - A needful cross is better than a needless comfort.

"If ye be without chastisement, . . . ye are not sons." It is the wicked who are not in trouble like other men, neither are plagued like other men. He who has no sorrow, has greater cause to be afflicted, than he whose tears are his meat day and night. It was Jesus who said, "Woe unto you that are rich ! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full ! for you shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now ! for ye shall mourn and weep." Welcome grief.

Christ gets no higher honors from this earth than those he wins from the children of sorrow. In early times nothing more advanced his cause than the sufferings of the martyrs. When a believer rejoices in tribulation he proves that, in the forgiveness of sins, a solid foundation is laid for hope, and joy and peace, and that sorrow can never sink him so low that the joy of the Lord cannot reach him and raise him up again.

"Without adversity, grace withers;" And we are never well, but when our souls have health and prosper. The result of God's chastisements is, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness;" and there is no fruit like that. Myriads have said with David: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Remember, that heaven will be all the sweeter for the bitterness of earth; that "if thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small;" that, if God be for us, none can successfully oppose us; that to harden ourselves against God, will bring no good with it; that to hope in the Lord is ever a

duty, and that he who is most like a weaned child, is the wisest sufferer.

Make up your mind to do and suffer all God's will. The real Christian is a man of peace, yet no man fights so much Adverse to strife, he lives in war. He is a soldier, and must never lay aside his armour. He has a great fight of afflictions. Satan hurls fiery darts at him. The world crosses him. Sin in his own heart is a dreadful foe. God afflicts him. His soul often dwells among lions. He comes into deep waters. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. Tears will flow. Conflicts must be endured. Poverty, bereavement, treachery, unkindness, the failure of hope, the wickedness of man, disease and death may make the heart sad, but to the humble believer the victory is sure. "Have faith in God." "Lord increase our faith."

Nothing is more admirable than God's providence toward his people. "He stayeth his rough wind in the day of his cast wind." In the same event we often behold both his goodness and his severity. The one cheers, the other awes us. The rod and the pot of manna were kept together. In chemistry, two pungent bitters, nitrate of silver, and hypsulphate of soda, when combined, produce the sweetest substance known. But in providence, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

"Are the consolations of God small with thee?" Perhaps it is because you do not set a proper value upon spiritual comforts. Perhaps piety in your own heart is in a low state, faith is weak, love has lost its ardor, tenderness of conscience is not cultivated, or aversion to self-denial is strong. Are you living in the indulgence of any sin? If so, "why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee," saith God.

The gospel makes provision for "strong consolation." No logic is stronger than that by which inspired men, argue for the comfort of the saints. Paul and Silas never had better reasons for their conduct than when in the jail of Philippi, "at midnight they prayed, and sang praises to God, and the

prisoners heard them." God has given us exceeding great and precious promises. The Bible is full of them. To lay hold of them is wisdom, and life, and peace.

"Wherefore lift up the hands, which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." Encourage yourself in the Lord your God. Many a bitter bud produces delicious fruit. Be patient unto the coming of Jesus Christ. Abound in acts of charity. Beware of carnal reasonings. Cultivate heavenly-mindedness. Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you. Set the Lord always before you. Nothing can harm you, if you follow that which is good. Live, as seeing Him who is invisible. Perplex not yourself with reasonings about things too deep for you. ~~Come~~ what may, say, "Not my will, but thine, O God, be done." If God takes all earthly props and comforts away, say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." So, through riches of grace in Christ Jesus, you shall have a happy issue out of all your tribulations, followed by an eternity of bliss, in which you shall consider all the way the Lord hath led you, and eternally praise him for his mercy and goodness.

SUBMISSION.

Submissive to thy will, my God,
I all to thee resign,
And bow before thy chastening rod ;
I mourn, but not repine,

Why should my foolish heart complain,
When wisdom, union and love
Direct the stroke, inflict the pain,
And point to joys above ?

How short are all my sufferings here.
How needful every cross !
Away, my unbelieving fear,
Nor call my gain, my loss.

Then give, dear Lord, or take away,
I'll bless thy sacred name ;
My Jesus, yesterday, to-day,
For ever is the same !

