

Affliction the Lot of Saints Below

From "Solitude Sweetened"

by James Meikle, (1730-1799)

While I am mortal, I must taste of the waters of Mara; drink of the cup of adversity; and swim the tempestuous ocean. It is the perfection of angels, that they could never experience the *pain* of mental disquiet, or the pangs of anguish. And it is the happiness of departed saints, to obtain joy for mourning, a crown for crosses; and to forget their misery, if not wholly, yet to remember it as waters, once swelled to a dreadful flood—but which now have forever flown away. It is, then the misery of the sons of men, only while here, to be, as it were, a mark set up for the arrows of tribulation, and to be engaged in constant war, and in perpetual broils. But it is the privileges of the Christian soldier to wear the shield of faith, with which he shall be able to quench the fiery darts of Satan, and to ward off the sling-stones of tribulation which pelt him from every quarter. How, then, may I triumph under all my afflictions? Consider,

1. Afflictions come from God, whatever, be the instrument. "You have chastised me, and I was chastised—you have afflicted me in faithfulness."

2. Afflictions are sent out of love. "Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives."

3. Afflictions are for my good. "Our human fathers punished us for a short time, as it seemed right to them; but God does it for our own good, so that we may share his holiness."

4. Afflictions are for the exercise of grace, even of that noble grace of faith. "When I am afraid, I will trust in you;" here faith is improved by affliction. "Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing." "And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

5. Afflictions are noble antidotes against, and preservatives from sin. "Before I was afflicted, I strayed—but now I keep your word."

6. Afflictions assimilate the saints to their glorious Head, their sympathizing and feeling High Priest, who was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Yes, in the work of redemption, "the Captain of their salvation was made perfect through sufferings."

7. Afflictions give a general disgust of all created things, and prove the creature to be subject to vanity; hence, says one much tempered in affliction, "I have seen an end of all perfection."

8. Afflictions teach humanity and sympathy to fellow-creatures in the same circumstances. Israel, from their being strangers, were to know the heart of a stranger, and deal kindly with him; and in this men ought to imitate him, "who suffered being tempted, that he might know how to support those who are tempted, and be a merciful High Priest to his people."

9. Afflictions make very humble, and break the haughty mind and bring down the lofty thought. "I shall go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul; my soul is as a weaned child." And God has this in view by them—to hide pride from man.

10. Afflictions make the man rightly exercised therein, to know himself, and think on his former ways; to resort often to the throne of grace, go often to God, and increase, as it were, the acquaintance between God and his soul. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.

11. Afflictions give clear and certain proof of the providence of God, who in six troubles and in seven delivers out of them. They preach his power, who makes his people pass through fire and water, not to ruin, which we might well expect—but to a wealthy place, to heaven and to glory.

12. Afflictions prepare for glory, and make us fit to join the company of those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their garments and made them white in the blood of the lamb, therefore are they before the throne of God, and enjoy him in all his divine plenitude, world without end.

Shall I, then, despise the discipline of heaven, from which none are exempted, no, not even the Son of God? Yes, all the heirs of glory are brought up in the 'school of the cross'. O royal privilege, inestimable blessing, to be under the care of heaven, and tutelage of God! Away, despondency, begone; you would cast a covering over the love of him who is my tower in troublous days; and make me conclude hard things of him who has thoughts of kindness towards me. Can infinite wisdom be at a loss to contrive, or infinite power confounded to bring to pass, to bring to perfection, my relief? Until then, I shall, I will believe; nor shall I look to means, or tie Omnipotence to them.

Bring Israel to the rock to quench their thirst! What! Can solid flint be converted into a cooling stream? But, lo! the aged rock divides asunder, and lets the promised springs refresh the parched multitude! Omnipotence, rather than not perform, will stop the course of nature, and make the restless billows rise in liquid walls, that Israel's bondaged sons may tread the trackless sand! Omnipotence will bid the raven feed, with morning and evening care, the wandering prophet; and forbid the fire to burn, or even to singe the

garments of the glorious martyrs. Yes, to feed his chosen people, he creates and rains down manna from above.

Who, then, should bound his power, or doubt his faithfulness? God will never break his word, whatever men think; nor falsify his faithful promise. Cursed unbelief implies, that either God promises what he never intends to perform, or what he is not able to perfect; both which are blasphemous! Both which, O my soul! abhor, and rather rejoice in tribulation, which, when watered with the dew of heaven, is so far from being a barren soil—that it is the nursery of other graces, and produces endurance; endurance produces proven character; and proven character produces hope; and hope produces strong confidence, and sweet dependence on that God whose love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Again, in affliction the saints are ascertained of the love and care of God, when their prayers enter into his holy habitation, and their requests are answered to the joy of their soul. Hence it was sin in Israel to chide with Moses, and to quarrel with God, when brought into difficulties and dangers that seemed inextricable every way. Before them the Red Sea forbids them to advance, high hills on every side hinder their escape; and behind advancing hosts, swollen with rage, and ravening after blood, deny a safe retreat. Now man is more than bewildered; all courage fails; faith and hope are low; fears are high; and, alas! their eye is not towards Him who can do all things, and who did instantaneously, to manifest his power, and fix his people's faith in himself, divide the raging floods, and build the restless waters in crystal walls, to bound their steps in ways not known before, and clothe them in shady night which darted pitchy darkness in the eyes of the keen pursuer.

Seeing You, O Governor of men! can make crooked things straight, rough places plain, and affliction even to become a friend—I will rejoice in you forever, nor quarrel at your conduct. Yes, woe to them; nay, woe to me, if I use any unlawful means, or be too anxious to set my nest on high, that I may be delivered from the power of evil. Agitating affliction, like the ebb and flow of the sea—casts out mire and dirt, sweeps its troubled bosom, refines the affections, and purifies the soul. Take courage, O my soul! and mind that in a little while—and sin will be no more, and sorrow will be no more, and temptations will be no more, and troubles will be no more; and time will be no more. But yet a little while, and love, and life and light, and liberty, and joy, and glory, rapture and delight—in a word, God and all his fullness—are yours for evermore!

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