Psalms - Commentaries by Algernon James Pollock

Comforted of God, Lord of Hosts and the God of Jacob, The

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"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Psa. 46)

Twice over in this Psalm do we get these remarkable words: "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge"—a Psalm, too, for the sons of rebellious Korah. It is like the wonderful refrain: " For His mercy endureth forever," occurring again and again in the Old Testament, and repeated twenty-six times in the twenty-six verses of Psa. 136—a mercy that nothing can exhaust or break down, a mercy that endureth forever.

"The Lord Of Hosts!"

What a comforting expression! How it stills our hearts in the presence of all the power of the enemy! "The Lord of hosts," whose unlimited power and boundless resources make the victory certain. And if we can complete the sentence, however feeble and weak, we may well remain in perfect peace. "The Lord of hosts is with us." Absolutely feeble, absolutely weak—it matters not. "The Lord of hosts is with us." That settles everything.

No wonder the Psalmist, with less light than ourselves, could triumphantly exclaim: -

" God is our refuge and strength,A very present help in trouble.Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,Though the mountains shake with theswelling thereof. Selah!"

Well might he pause (Selah!) at this point. What more suggestive of stability than the earth we walk upon and the everlasting hills? What more emblematical of instability than the restless sea? Yet when the most unstable thing overcomes the most stable, when the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea, the Psalmist has something immovable on which to rest -

God Is Our Refuge And Help

Restless, troubled child of God, do you thus know " the Lord of hosts "? Do you think the power of evil can ever conquer God or thwart His purposes of love? Nay, how can you doubt for one moment?

The Psalmist knew " the Lord of hosts." That was enough to deliver him from every tempest of fear. But we can go a step further. A step?—ay, many steps.

We Know God As Father.

He numbers the hairs of our head. He puts our tears in the bottle of His remembrance.

"Precious thought, my Father knoweth,Careth for His child;Bids me nestle closer to HimWhen the storm beats wild.Though my earthly hopes are shattered,And the teardrops fall,Yet He is Himself my solace,Yea, my 'all in all.' "

When " the Lord of hosts is with us " we can be at peace in the midst of the storm, but when in spirit we are with Him, we are where the storms come not. What a change!—from the waters roaring and troubled, and the mountains shaking, to the peace that surrounds Him. We read in the next verse -

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God,The holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High.God is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved."

What a contrast! We are across the bar of the open tempestuous sea, and have reached the calm, sweet haven of rest. The storm and the raging waters are exchanged for the river of God—calm, peaceful, gladdening, refreshing!

Doubtless this refers to an earthly Jerusalem—an earthly millennium. But can we not transfer the simile, and put it in the setting of Christianity? Do we not know what it is to leave our own tumultuous circumstances and make a journey in spirit into that region where the river of His pleasure flows, where there is no trail of the serpent, no blight, no sin, no death, no unsatisfied longing?

The storms but drive us nearer home, and the discipline of a Father's hand may all he turned to account. But how blessed to anticipate the peace of home, to drink even now of the river of His pleasure, ere we reach it and know it in all its blessed fullness and reality!

But the Psalmist goes on -

"He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth;He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder;He burneth the chariot on the fire.Be still, and know that I am God."

For the present God is our refuge; in the future He will subdue all the power of the enemy, and the whole earth shall be at rest. Let us learn our lesson: " Be still, and know that I am God."

" The God Of Jacob "

Why not the God of Israel? "The Lord of hosts" gives us the sense of His power; "the God of Jacob" tells us the kind of people He shows mercy to, and the omnipotence of that mercy. None but God could have gone on with Jacob, and at the last brought him to worship as, in the weakness of death, he leant upon his staff.

"The God of Jacob." How it appeals to us, for we are all Jacobs! Scheming, plotting, covetous man! As Jacob there is nothing, absolutely nothing to corn-

mend him. He took advantage of his brother's dire need to deprive him of his birthright. He deceived his blind old father to secure it. His after-course was marked by intrigue and weakness. And yet the Psalmist at a later date could write: " The God of Jacob is our refuge."

Was it that God condoned Jacob's plotting and wickedness? Far be the thought. And if we find, even as Christians, the tendency to evil within and constant failure that only our God knows, is it that He can go on with sin? We may be outwardly irreproachable in conduct, but how many, nay, all of us, mourn over our weakness and inconsistency! How, then, can God be the God of Jacob—our God?

Is it not that He breaks down the Jacob in us? Do not we all halt upon our thighs more or less? Step by step, God weakened Jacob till at length, in the very weakness of death, he could, leaning on his staff, worship.

And so "the God of Jacob " deals with us. The flesh has been unsparingly judged at the cross, and His mercy endureth forever, for He takes steps that Jacob shall practically die. We may not die physically, but just in proportion as the Jacob within us is held to be dead or we dead to it, so are we ready to worship.

May we trust " the Lord of hosts " more—may we submit to the ways of " the God of Jacob " with us, and blessing will result. What a God is ours! How perfect are His ways!

Comforted of God, My Cup Runneth Over

(Psa. 23:5)

There is a process needed in all our souls, that we should be able to say: "My cup runneth over." This is not the experience of the first part of the Psalm. There, in being able to say: "The Lord is my Shepherd," it is easy to add: "I shall not want." Accordingly, we find the Shepherd's care expressed in the green pastures and still waters of His providing, that the soul thus invigorated (for this is the meaning of "restore," as food or rest restores) may walk "in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake." But in the latter part of the Psalm there is a marked change. The green pastures and waters of rest are no longer present to the soul, but the valley of the shadow of death. This is commonly taken to mean a death-bed. Practically the experience of this Psalm is often only reached on a death-bed. But it ought not to be so; and that this is not the thought of the passage may be clear from the words: " Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

There is a greater death than ours to hearts that know the Lord. Surely it is the shadow of His death, the death of Psa. 22, that lies upon the whole scene of this world. The world in which our Lord was crucified is the valley of the shadow of death. Oh! for hearts to be more affected by His death. How far has the whole scene here closed for us, enwrapped in the shadow of that greatest death of all?

What is there then left for us? "THOU art with me." It is the Shepherd Himself proved more to the heart than all His precious care. He is more than all He can give. When the soul reaches this in its growth, shut up to Himself in a world closed to it by His cross, it is not merely that "I shall not want," but "MY Cu runneth over." He has brought us into the reality and blessedness of His own experience! He Himself, who once as Man on earth could say: "The Lord is the portion of My cup," now fills that cup to overflowing for us.

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