

Paul's Fight with Beasts at Ephesus.

BY GEO. W. TRUETT.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul makes use of this expression, the meaning of which has been the occasion of a vast amount of speculation: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not?" What does Paul mean when he says he fought with beasts? Is this to be taken literally? It is true that some of the imperial tyrants of those days sometimes employed the fearful method of persecuting God's people, by turning wild beasts upon them in the arenas where professional gladiators were wont to furnish brutal performances for the entertainment of the people. And, indeed, the tale has been handed down, from the legendary writings, that such was the manner of Paul's conflict on one occasion, in which conflict he bravely triumphed over the mad beasts, by the wave of his hand and an appeal to heaven. But, this legend, like many others, would be more interesting if it were only true.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul enumerates his many conflicts, but literal fighting with beasts in the arena is not mentioned, as will be seen from this enumeration: "In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." What then does Paul mean by the expression? His meaning doubtless is that he had conflicts with men of beast-like passions, as, for instance, his conflict with Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen, who yelled for two long hours in the streets of Ephesus, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Paul's preaching there had interfered with the sale of the shrines for the goddess Diana, and hence the mad tumult. That Paul was at that time in the extreme danger is indicated thus in his second letter to the Corinthians: "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." And then he adds these beautiful and glorious words: "Ye also helped together by prayer for us."

There are other Scriptures that help to explain Paul's expression about fighting with beasts. It is not an uncommon figure in the Bible that men are compared to wild beasts. John, the forerunner of the Master, called some of his hearers vipers, and so also did the Master. Again, the Master commands, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you." David makes mention of his enemies as wild beasts. And Paul writing to Timothy, supposedly about Nero, says: "I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." From such expressions, it is easy to conclude that Paul's language is figurative, but expressive none the less of his real and sore conflict with men beast-like in their passions.

The context of Paul's statement brings out more vividly the great doctrine he is presenting—the resurrection from the dead. Paul looks about him and sees and feels that his whole Christian life is a sore and prolonged conflict. Without and within there are trying foes. Foes external continually beset him, and a thorn in the flesh reminds him ever of his struggle. Is this life all? he asks. Does the grave terminate one's existence? If so, then Paul inquires, what is the profit of all my endurance, self-sacrifice, conflict? It is a great question—what earnest soul has not asked it in substance?

But, waiving here any discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection, as suggested by Paul's questions, what of the fact that the Christian life is a conflict? Is it true? Verily, it is true. The Scriptures are unequivocally clear on this proposition. God's people are exhorted to fight the good fight of faith, to put on the whole armor of God, to war a good warfare. They are faithfully reminded that theirs shall be a way of tribulation, that it is a part of the divine plan concerning Christians that they shall suffer for Christ as well as believe on him. But the question keeps coming back, is there any advantage in such conflict? The answer to this question must be in the affirmative. The reasons are at hand. First of all, the conquest of a difficulty gives increased strength to the conqueror. Life is larger and broader and better to him who has surmounted difficulties. Such an experience gives him to feel that he has won once and therefore can win again. The frightened, fleeing, cowardly soldier, shut at last to actual and desperate combat, and compelled to fight whatever his feelings, is braver and more

be put to the test and to win, is to give strength to character. This is a great way to discipline character.

Then, growth follows exercise. This is a deep law of life. In the spiritual world we are exhorted to exercise ourselves unto godliness. We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. We learn by doing. Experience is an indispensable teacher.

It is true also that conflicts bring out great leaders. All history answers with examples and illustrations. It was so with Moses in the Egyptian court, when the cries of his oppressed people kept ringing in his ears. It was so with David, when Goliath defied the people of Israel and their God. It was so with Luther, when the abuses of the papacy called for the reformation. It was so with Knox, when materialism and unbelief threatened to overwhelm the religious life of Scotland. It was so with Carey when his great heart burned with the conviction that it was the heaven appointed duty of God's people, with their money and with their lives, to carry the news of Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the earth. It is always and everywhere true that conflict brings out leaders. There are illustrations without number in the world of business. And who does not know that the chances for the son of poverty, for success in the race of life, far out rank those of the son reared in luxury? Conflict gives leadership.

A deep and precious fact for the Christian to keep in mind through all his conflicts, is that thus he is being privileged more really to enter into fellowship with Christ. That must have been an awful experience to Paul the first time he stood before Nero. Concerning it he said, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." Now see what he goes on to say; "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." An awful trial that must have been to Paul, but when he came out of it he knew more about Christ than ever before. He knew something experimentally of the fellowship of his sufferings. Christ was nearer and dearer and more precious. Then Paul was not the loser by his conflict. Rightly received, conflict always brings with it most gracious compensation. Unbending fidelity to duty, whatever the odds, brings its great and sure reward. It does pay to be true and faithful, self-sacrificing and unselfish, whatever our conflicts may be. Ask the Bible if it be not so, ask God, ask conscience, ask personal experience, and an unwavering yes is answered by them all.

What then is the conclusion of the whole matter? It is that though we may have an unceasing conflict with beasts, external and internal, our one and only concern is to hold fast to duty and to God. On the tombstone of one of England's knights of old these lines are written: "Here lies a soldier whom all must applaud; Who fought many battles at home and abroad; But the hottest engagement he ever was in Was the conquest of self in the battle of sin."

Our sorest conflict may be with the unsubdued passions of our own poor selves. This then is the word for us to remember: "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." And this: "My grace is sufficient for thee"—Baptist Standard.

God's Power To Save.

BY MELSON M. MELZER.

Julius G. Seltona was a short, heavy, muscular steel-worker, in the mills of Alanton. He was 36 years of age; earned large wages, with helpers under his control. As an inveterate hater of preachers and believers none in the mill surpassed him. None of his family were allowed church or Sunday school privileges. "I would rather have a beer saloon in my cellar than a Sunday school in my house." "Preachers are liars, hypocrites, corrupt, and too proud to look at a laboring man, and one shall never enter my home." Such were some of his expressions. He loved his family, but not well enough to avoid spending much of his money and time, when off of work hours, in saloons and gambling rooms.

One day, in a house-to-house canvassing, I came to his. He met me at the door; stood in it; would not let me in, but talked very ugly to me about preachers. They are a lazy polluted set; hypocrites, caring no more for us toilers than for flies." Good naturedly I parried him; told him how I had been a laborer, and preached only because I felt God's call to do so. I persisted in showing him that I knew much about the laborer's interests and difficulties; how laborer and capitalist were related to each other, and, finally, the true relation of both to a really true religion. At last he closed the door behind him, came out and we sat on the edge of his veranda for nearly two hours, discussing all sorts of questions bearing on his and my vocations. Finally, seeing him in a reasonably good humor, I left him and went home.

I had often been in the mill and at his furnace. After this I always took interest in his work, and whenever I met him spoke to him, or chatted, if I could, without being officious. He came to be quite sociable in a kind of armslength way. A few months later his baby died. What a surprise to every one of his fellow laborers that he would have me, a preacher, conduct funeral services

as to win him to my Lord! I presented the theme of "Infant Salvation," and, in closing, appealing to the family, as to the wisdom of preparation to meet that little loved one with Jesus in the better country. He wept under his grief, but not under the appeal. After that I ventured to go to his house just once, when he was at home, and for that time was kindly received. I know how unwise it would be to go often, or to seem too anxious about his soul. However, he was more friendly and sociable than before.

Six months went by, and one morning he came for me to conduct the funeral of the child of his helper. This, too, was a surprise to many. He was present. The theme was "Jesus' Great Love and Sympathy." Again this great man was melted to tears. He wept freely. However, he was less friendly and harder to approach after this. Of course I had to humor him, but ceased not to pray for him. Two months or so after, at 11 o'clock in the evening, a heavy rap was heard at our hall door below. Going to an open window above, I asked, "Who is it? and what is wanted?"

"It is me, Julie Seltona. I want to see you Mr. Melzer, if I may, right away."

"All right. I'll be down."

My good wife feared to have me go down lest he might be in his cups and use violence. But I went, and asked him into the parlor. "Mr. Seltona, what can I do for you? Is there anything serious?" He was weeping. He replied as soon as he could control himself: "I was going up Harrison Street when that Mr. Pettibone began preaching at the corner. I stopped to hear him, and something came over me. Oh, I felt awfully! I don't know what it was. When he stopped preaching and went to his tent for the meeting, I followed, too, and at the close I went up, and he prayed for me. I thought I was going to feel all right. But here came Selknap, who makes such a loud profession, and who, so many know, is a liar and, even a thief. When he tried to talk religion to me I got mad; and, oh, I don't know what to do, Mr. Melzer. So I came here to see if you can tell me."

I told him that the power that fell upon him at the street and tent preaching was that of the Holy Spirit; that God, in love, had come to save his soul; that the awful feeling he had was conviction of sin, wrought by the Holy Spirit upon his heart. "And now, my friend," said I, "God asks you to turn, with all your heart, from your life of unbelief and of sin and to accept Jesus as your Saviour now. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If you realize yourself to be indeed a sinner, then you are the one he came to save, for he loved you and gave himself to save you."

"But, Mr. Melzer, what of such Christians as that Belknap? How can I believe it is real when I see him making such great professions?"

"Mr. Seltona, one rotten egg in a dozen does not prove that all are rotten. There are Judases now as there were when Christ was here on earth. The question for you to settle is not what this or that man is, but, 'What will you do with Jesus the Christ?' He came to save you, waits right now to save you, if you will accept him with all your heart."

Thus we talked for about two hours, using much Scripture all the while. I prayed with him, and as he started home, still weeping, he said: "Mr. Melzer, come to my house in the morning."

"At what hour?"

"Oh, about 9 o'clock in the morning."

"All right, I'll be there."

When I went upstairs I awoke my wife, saying: "Up, my dear; we must pray for that man." There in the dark midnight hour we pleaded for his salvation with all our hearts. Next morning at 9 o'clock, Bible in hand, I was at his home. The night and morning had been spent in prayer for him and his. He was willing to be led, but offered skeptical objections. But the Holy Spirit directed me at each point to right Scriptures to overturn all he could oppose. At last I said:

"Mr. Seltona, open your Bible at John vii. 17 and read." He did so, reading: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself."

I said: "Do you believe that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well; now turn to Psalm xxvii. 4, 5, and read." He read clearly: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he will give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; and trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass."

"Now, my friend, do you believe that word of God?" "Yes." "Are you willing now and here to commit yourself, soul and body to Christ, and do his will without reservation, so he may save you?" He hesitated. I pleaded with him, and prayed silently to God while I pleaded. After a few minutes, that seemed very long to me, he said: "Yes, I do leave all to Jesus."

His wife was present through it all. I pleaded with and for her, too. When he gave up all, she threw her arms about his neck and wept for joy. She, too yielded all to