

hearers. But he thinks the great thing wanted at present in the Presbyterian Church as a civilizing force is an extensive cultivation of the "psalmodic element." It is the same mistake that leads to the following closing sentence, in which, no doubt, to his own great surprise and amusement the celebrated Professor of Greek and believer in Gaelic is made the great propounder and advocate of the ideas and plans of the Chalmerses, Candlishes and Guthries of a past generation. "In his 'Curiosities of Literature' the elder Disraeli tells us that 'the history of Psalm-singing is the history of the Reformation.' In many of our congregations at present it is becoming an unknown art. Therefore do we rejoice to see a man of Professor Blackie's acumen and position calling public attention to the vast importance of it, as well as to the advisability of introducing such alterations in our ecclesiastical arrangements as would promote the utility and the strength of our divinely appointed Presbyterianism. Indeed, there is hardly one of the points which he has now been advocating, the importance and utility of which did not commend themselves to the minds of Chalmers, and Candlish, and Guthrie in the past generation. Learned leisure, more evangelistic work, more public catechizing, more powerful preaching, and less of it, more psalm-singing—these are some of the present wants of Presbyterianism." For the versatility, fun, frolic, exuberant "go" and matchless self-confidence, as well as occasionally the delicious nonsense, of genius, commend us to John Stuart Blackie; but we beg to repeat that he is neither the authoritative expounder of the Calvinistic principles nor the recognized and honoured reformer of Presbyterian practices of the present day, on the other side of the Atlantic or this.

### A SOLACE FOR ANXIOUS THOUGHTS.

BY REV. JOHN HALL, D.D.

"In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul."—Psalm xciv. 19.

It sometimes happens to a man—perhaps it is the experience of some one here—that an intolerable load is pressing down the spirits. He says, "If I could only have quietness and peace of mind, I could bear my external ills." Men of wealth, who are burdened and disappointed, envy the poor who live in contentment; the guilty envy the innocent whose condition may be otherwise miserable; they who live constantly under the gaze of the public eye often long for the quiet of lowly lives, in the less noticeable walks of life. The mind of man makes for him peace or pain; a hell of heaven, or a heaven of hell. But in the multitude of thoughts in us there is something which can give peace.

The stream of thinking cannot be interrupted during our waking hours, if indeed it is in sleep. We say that we are not thinking, when we mean that we have no special train of thought in mind. Moreover, this continuous stream has a moral character, which gives complexion to our being. The stream that winds through the valley seems limpid, pure and transparent, but the oxide of iron it carries, reddens the stones washed year after year by its waters. So the tone of thought leaves a mark on character.

We are not to repress these multitudinous thoughts. In fact, the more we think the more we live. We feed the stream of thought by knowledge. Right knowledge will keep it pure. But all this is not enough to give satisfaction. There must be something from God to give us peace and serenity of soul. John Stuart Mill was a man of astonishing versatility of mind and breadth of observation, yet he expressed "profound dissatisfaction" with the world. Shelley and his school of poets, with a keen appreciation of nature, suffered disquiet of heart.

The text suggests more than mental activity. The thoughts are anxious thoughts, pains or "cares" as Alexander translates. Some of you to-night have anxious feelings, personal griefs, domestic or business trials, hidden from the gaze of others. What histories are here unwritten, in variety and severity of experience known only to God! The text invites us to a practical truth, and let us each look at it experiment-

ally, that we may be wiser and better. What are God's comforts, given to delight our souls?

1. Peace. (a) In reference to God's law. Science, as well as revelation, teaches the inviolability of law. Penalty follows its infraction. We have broken the law, and deserve punishment. What is the remedy? Christ magnifies the law, meets the penalty for us, so that, being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Is this your condition? (b) In reference to the upbraidings of conscience. This is a peace different from that of justification. When conscience, our master under Christ, sees that we are honestly seeking to do God's will, it anticipates the Lord's final verdict and says, "Well done!" Have you this great peace? Do you keep conscience delicate and responsive to truth? Do you say, "I can break with my party or with my friend, but I will not violate my conscience?" (c) As to Providence. God does His will without consulting us. The unexpected event happens. We know not what shall be on the morrow. God's providences change, but He does not. What we call accidents are known to Him. The sparrow does not fall unnoticed, and I am of more value than many sparrows. He orders my way; I cannot, nor would I if I could. Difficult times have these been a few years past. It has been hard for some to be at once decent and honest. In your business and in your home, had you restfulness, trusting your family, your debts, your all, implicitly to God?

2. Fellowship with God is another delightful solace for anxious thoughts. This word is a familiar one so far as its syllables go, but who realizes what fellowship with God is?

When a boy of nine, I was sent away from home to get a better classical education. I had a friend and playmate. He was called away from school. Never will the memory of that parting "good-bye" be forgotten. That gloomy evening, the darkness of sky and field, and the loneliness of my heart, are still fresh in thought. I then knew what human fellowship was. David and Jonathan, John and Jesus, enjoyed sweet companionship. Grace sanctifies nature, lifting us higher. Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It seems incredible that such dignity should be ours. Congenial tastes form the basis of true fellowship. God looks at His Son and calls Him His Well-beloved, in whom He is well pleased. The believer, too, says of Christ, "He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." The finite and the Infinite here touch. Holy things are desired, and unholy things viewed with disgust, by both. Christ's meat and drink was to do His Father's will, and the Christian says, "Not my will, but Thine, be done." In a degree we enjoy with God the fellowship that Christ and the Father had. Great and good men lift us when we are associated with them, even though we take the humblest share. How should we joy to go with John Howard on his errand of mercy, were he here again; or with John Wesley, who roused multitudes with his impetuous earnestness; or stand with John Knox, as he might again thunder forth the truth, protesting against political and religious tyranny; or with Robert Hall and William Carey. But the ennobling influence of communion and fellowship with God is unspeakably greater.

3. Hope is another solace for weary hearts. We now are not of age, but minors, waiting to come in possession of the estate. We are not now at home, but only pilgrims journeying homeward, expecting to reach the city of habitation prepared for us. We are betrothed to Christ, and the marriage is not yet. We look forward to the marriage supper, "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." Exceeding great and precious promises inspire us. Our Lord guarantees for their fulfilment. Hope rises as on wings at the prospect. Here we watch and fight; there is rest and peace yonder, and that forever! In the multitude of your anxious thoughts do these comforts, brethren, delight your soul? You have peaceful homes and a measure of prosperity in business, but trials will come. The sky is dark, your brow is clouded. "All have their troubles," it may be said. But this generalization does not prove a solace. It did not comfort you to hear that others were miserable. But you found

peace by taking God's promise and your personal needs to Him, saying, "Fulfil, now, O Lord, this word unto Thy servant, even as he trusteth in Thee." You arose from your knees saying, "He will surely bring me through," and He did. These light afflictions, which endure but for a moment, are working out an eternal weight of glory.

In application, a word as to how you may get more comforts;

A little comfort is a precious thing, but there are "more to follow." You have seen that each has been connected with knowledge. To know Christ as your justification; to understand God's law and to be studious observers of His providential dealings; to have a delicate and responsive conscience, heedful of all these teachings; to have a memory stored with these precious promises of God—all these are promotive of peace and fellowship, of hope and joy in Him. Seek, then, for truth continually. Get it from living teachers, from those who aim to hold forth, not themselves, but the truth. Next, read books. What blessings are these! Books have, as it were, both a body and a soul. They are ministering spirits. Like the angels, too, there are good and there are bad. Get good books; above all, be familiar with the Book of books. Here are youth, with restless energy and ardent aspirations, like the Athenians, ever seeking new things. Time and experience will teach you, but let me now persuade you to increase this knowledge and so to know this comfort, the fellowship enjoyed in the Christian life. Then you will rightly estimate the poor, sordid pleasures of this world when you ponder in your heart the thought of the next. Forget all I have said, if you must, but remember this, "In the multitude of my anxious thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul." God's Spirit will interpret its meaning to your heart. Had you a sick child at home, whose critical condition alarmed you, and at the same time a venture in stocks which was doubtful, and the word came to you that the latter had issued in a loss, while your child had passed the crisis in safety, you would say, "Let it go, it is a mere bagatelle, now that he lives, and I am spared the bitterness of a greater loss."

Act on this principle through the rest of your life. Your cares may be heavy, and your hardships many yet you will regard all as of little account if you are at peace with God, walking in fellowship with Him, with apostles and saints, toward the heavenly land, in hope and in full assurance of seeing the King in His beauty! Act on this principle, and the comforts of God will abundantly delight your soul.

### BENEFIT OF CLERGY.

The origin of this practice may be traced to the regard which was paid by the various Princes of Europe to the Church, and to the endeavours of the Pope to withdraw the clergy altogether from subjection to secular authority. Our earlier kings, after the Conquest, resisted this ecclesiastical assumption, as interference on their prerogative, but the result was only partial, one instance being the exemption of places consecrated to religious purposes from arrest for crimes, which led to the institution of sanctuaries; and also to the exemption of clergymen in certain cases from criminal punishment by secular judges; from this came the benefit of clergy, the claim of the *privilegium clericale*. It was then necessary that the prisoner should appear in his clerical habit and tonsure at trial; but in the course of time this was considered unnecessary, and the only proof required of the offender was his shewing to the satisfaction of the court that he could read, a rare accomplishment, except among the clergy, previous to the fifteenth century. At length all persons who could read, whether clergymen or lay clerks (as they were called in some ancient statutes) were admitted to the benefit of clergy in all prosecutions for offences to which the privilege extended.

Sir Francis Palgrave, in his "Merchant and Friar," gives a vivid picture of the proceeding that took place at these trials. A thief had been apprehended in Chepe, in the very act of cutting a purse from the gir-