

Nahum 1:3 (Russell Elliott) 139433

The Lord Hath His Way: Angels In White Expanded, #6, Lord Hath His Way, The (1:3)

"The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nah. 1:3).

Storms are more common and work greater havoc in some areas than in our own country, but even here they are often sufficiently alarming and accompanied by considerable loss of property and even of life. The storm that raged over part of England recently will not soon be forgotten. In certain districts trains were completely snowed in, while on most of the lines they were many hours late. Communication was interrupted all over the country. But perhaps the most singular feature was the number of large trees leveled to the ground by the force of the gale. In one park, not far from here, a dozen huge elms could be seen prostrate within a small area. A tree suddenly swept down by the wind is an impressive sight, and it reminds us of departed greatness and the instability of all things seen. That which appeared so firmly rooted, and was once so stately, towering above all other vegetation, is suddenly brought low. No more will any enjoy the shade of its branches. The ruthless storm has done its work.

Do not storms enter into human life with devastating effect? The fair prospect is suddenly overcast, hopes are blasted, endearing ties are broken — the hurricane sweeps over the landscape, and all is changed. What desolation marks its path! Nothing is spared — nothing is saved. The light has become dim, the glory is departed, the heart is rent, and hope seems dead.

How unrestrained, how heedless, how purposeless a whirlwind seems! It does not appear to take account of its doings. It listens to no appeal, but strikes out of its path whatever may come in its way. It regards nothing, and cares for nothing. Do not some of the sorrows of life seem very much of this character? The other day, a Christian man, who had lived an exemplary life and whose faith was unquestioned, walked out of his house and never returned. His body was not found until seven weeks after, and then it was discovered in a lake. What days of anxious suspense this involved for those dear to him. We cannot explain these things, we can only say, "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet."

The whirlwind and the storm are His ways. Not only that, but He controls and uses them. He has His way in them. They are not really going against His will, but doing it. They are part of it. And that which seems so aimless has a purpose. Yes, He is in it. When we discover that, the bitterness is gone. His presence is indicated in the very words we are dwelling upon — "the clouds are the dust of HIS feet." These dark, disastrous clouds, as we think — clouds so full of gloom — they are part of His track, they are the dust of His feet. The dust may seem to hide Him, but at the same time it tells us He is there.

Storms often come suddenly. Very often the more sudden they are the worse they are. As we traveled home that morning, the sun shone out brightly and seemed to betoken a fine day. An hour or two later, the wind had reached hurricane strength, and the sun was driven before it. Similarly, how suddenly World War I fell upon the nations of Europe. To thousands in this country the news that the war was at their doors came like a thunderclap as they were leaving home for the August Bank holiday. Do you wish that you had received longer notice of the sorrow that has broken your heart?

The other day, a letter came from a wife whose husband had recently been taken to a mental institution. The Sunday before, the preacher had taken for his text: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons" (Acts 1:7). Having read the words, he leaned forward and said in a most impressive way: "Have you ever thanked God that you did not know the future? I have many times." Husband and wife sat together as they heard these words. Neither knew the future. Before the week was out the blow had fallen, and they were separated. No, the storm in the physical world may not give long notice of its coming, and it is wisely ordered that in human affairs we know not what a day may bring forth. How little that old saint, Sir Alexander Simpson, knew when he left a meeting to go home that death was just in front of him. "Proceeding homeward alone and on foot to his residence in Queen Street (Edinburgh), he was crossing Frederick Street when a car came upon him in the darkness, and knocked him down." To add to the tragedy, it was a friend's car. The eminent surgeon was carried to the Royal Infirmary where he soon passed away. But he needed no preparation. He had been a believer from his early days. At the close of his professional career, when speaking at the Edinburgh graduation ceremony he had borne this testimony: "I do not know in what mood of pessimism I might have stood before you today had it not been that ere the dew of youth had dried from off me I made friends with the sinless Son of Man, who is the wellhead of the stream that vitalizes all advancing civilization, and who claims to be the First and the Last and the Living One, and has the keys of death and the unseen. My experience compels me to own that claim." Curiously enough, he had printed with his own hand on the first page of his pocket diary these words:

"He knoweth what is in the darkness, He knoweth the way that I take."

How good to be reminded of this. Many an event is dark to us; not one is dark to Him. Things do not baffle His knowledge just because they baffle ours.

God's way is indeed "in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet." Yet the same chapter tells us "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nah. 1:7). There are matters and happenings we cannot attempt to explain. Our trust must be all the deeper. "He knoweth them that trust in Him." He loves to be trusted and He puts our trust to the test. He tells us He is good "the Lord is good." Do we believe that? Many things seem to contradict it. In the very same verse we read of "the day of trouble." Why does God allow trouble, if He is good? The answer is that we may experience what He can be to us in trouble. Instead of the trouble being a reason for doubting Him, it is to be an occasion for a deeper trust. Then we discover what a God He is.

After the great storm mentioned earlier there was an extraordinary calm. Within a few hours, comparatively, blue skies were overhead and the stormy wind had passed. Are we tempted to think the calm and brightness of former years will never come into our life again? So we might have thought as to the weather during that fatal Tuesday. Yet on Thursday the sun smiled upon us and gentle breezes fanned our cheeks. God can do the same in the moral atmosphere of our life as He does in the physical, if we will let Him. The calm in nature, to which we refer, did not restore what had perished, and with you there may be no restoration of the thing your heart clung to, or hoped for, but God Himself may fill that spot, and a deeper peace and even richer and more useful life may be the consequence. Put these two verses together and ponder them: "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" and then "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

It is our faith that He wants. And when and where can we trust Him better than in the whirlwind and the storm and with the clouds round about Him? The disciples needed no exercise of faith when they started on that voyage across the lake of Gennesaret. When the storm came it tested their faith and revealed more of Christ to them. They cried out, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" His response to their appeal showed that He did care and disclosed Him in a new light, so that they were constrained to say, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

With you it may not be a question of danger but of loss. Nevertheless, and none the less, you are ready to cry, "Master, carest Thou not?" And He has to say to you, as He said to those others, "Where is your faith?"

The other day, a mother stood watching her only son leave for the front line in the war. She was a widow and had, in addition, lately been bereaved of her only daughter. Now she was called upon to wave farewell — perhaps a last farewell — to her boy. As she did so, her eyes filled with tears and she turned back into the house with the thought that her loneliness and grief were literally beyond comfort. But on her table stood a small cardboard receptacle for texts, written on paper and folded up. She took one, perhaps almost mechanically, and the word of comfort God had in reserve for her was this: "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; AND THEY SHALL COME AGAIN FROM THE LAND OF THE ENEMY" (Jer. 31:16).

Could any words have been more appropriate? Or could anything have brought God so near?

Let us remember, then, that the whirlwind and the storm can do His work and His will, and that He permits it, even if He does not ordain it, in order that you may make Him your stronghold in the day of trouble and trust in Him. Do not think you are being driven about like a leaf before the wind; He has His way in it all. These rushing winds and stormy blasts that seem to make you their sport are doing His work just as unerringly as methods which seem less harsh. They are but the "stormy wind fulfilling His word" (Psalm 148:8).

What is of all importance is the frame of mind in which we accept these rough dealings and pass through these fiery ordeals. We are either made or marred in the process. A beautiful story was told in connection with the Royal visit to the Potteries, some time ago. While the king was on his way to see some special china, which was being made for use in Buckingham Palace two vases were shown to him. Both were made of the same material and both had been painted in the same style and manner, but one was a beautiful ornament and the other blurred and unsightly. And the reason? One had taken the fire, and the other had not! Passing on, the king came to the china he was to inspect. A young lady was busily engaged painting the inside of the cups black. He could not understand and asked to see the special cups that were being prepared for him. He had not given any orders for black. Again, he was pointed to the same cups. And then the young lady explained that underneath the black was gold, and when the cup passed through the fire the black would be burnt off, and the gold would be burnt in.

Black and gold! The black has to be burnt off and the gold has to be burnt in. What lessons we can still learn in the Potter's house! This is what God is doing, burning off the black, and burning in the gold, and He has many processes by which He will reach His end. And in recognition of this, when the whirlwind and the storm strike across our life, may we have the grace to bow the head while we say,

"And let the storm which does Thy will Deal with me as it may."

Someone has said: "A bar of iron worth \$1 when wrought into horse shoes is worth \$2. If made into needles it is worth \$70. If into knife blades it is worth \$650. If into springs for watches it is worth \$50,000. What a drilling the poor bar must undergo to be worth this! But the more it is manipulated, the more it is hammered, and passes through fire, and is beaten, and pounded, and polished, the greater its value. May this parable help us to be still and long-suffering. Those who suffer most are capable of yielding most and it is through pain that God is getting the most out of us, for His glory and the blessing of others."

The other day, in a friend's house, we were struck by some words within a frame which spanned nearly the whole of one side of the room. In the center, in large letters, was the one word LOVED.

To the left these lines:

"Loved with all the love That fills the heavens With eternal song."

and to the right:

"Weep not weary heart! How short the sorrow, And the love how long!"

Loved! that is all we need to know.

"The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm," then the storm passes, and we hear instead: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

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Each of these articles by R. Elliott is not currently in print in the book Angels in White but was included in the original printing of that title many years ago.

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