

Reflections

reading notes

AUGUST 2005—*The Ministry of Pain*

Two high-minded young ladies meet a Scottish chieftain who represents the last of a less sophisticated but noble way of life in George MacDonald's book, *What's Mine's Mine*. They see him plowing a field with two stubborn oxen that require some manhandling. They are disturbed by his use of force and make a snide remark or two about his treatment of the oxen.

When the beasts of burden try to gore one another with their massive horns, Alister, the chieftain, drops a rein to handle the matter. "In a moment the plough was out of the furrow, and the bulls were straining every muscle, each to send the other into the wilds of the unseen creation. Alister sprang to their heads, and taking them by their noses forced them back into the line of the furrow." He then administered a blow to each animal, and made them stand still. The girls are repulsed.

George MacDonald then comments,

There are tender-hearted people who virtually object to the whole scheme of creation; they would neither have force used nor pain suffered; they talk as if kindness could do everything, even where it is not felt. Millions of human beings but for suffering would never develop an atom of affection. The man who would spare *due* suffering is not wise. It is folly to conclude a thing ought not to be done because it hurts. There are powers to be born, creations to be perfected, sinners to be redeemed, through the ministry of pain, that could be born, perfected, redeemed, in no other way.

Paul wrote of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18, 19); Hosea, "the ministry of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10); and Luke, "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). MacDonald writes of the "ministry of pain." I am not prepared to say that all pain is good, but some is. I am persuaded that the only lessons some people will ever learn are taught by Mr. Pain. (He's taught me a lesson or two—or three or four.)

Consider the painful circumstances that have taught others the lesson they needed to learn: Israel in captivity, Paul's thorn in the flesh, Paul's public rebuke of Peter, the death of David and Bathsheba's son, Nebuchadnezzar's beastly experience. The Psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I observe thy word" (Ps 119:67).

Mr. MacDonald is right, "There are powers to be born, creations to be perfected, sinners to be redeemed, through the ministry of pain, that could be born, perfected, redeemed, in no other way.

Steven Lloyd

Closer Look Publications • 11940 Telephone Avenue • Chino, California 91710
909/628-9428

For back issues go to www.closerlookbooks.com

