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Ephemera: untitled fragment on patience and on trusting in God

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Editor's Introduction

This orphan, which has neither date nor context, is part of the John Woolman Collection, a donation made in 1912 to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania by Maj. Samuel Comfort, a grandson of the third-born of Woolman's grandsons.

The holograph is in Woolman's hand (except for the donor's name and the date in the upper right corner of the first page).

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Text

Major S. Comfort

11.14.1912

1 Do you imitate his patience and example in staying as he does for the coming of the Lord. Be patient therefore, brothers, to the coming of the day of the Lord. Behold: the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth and has long patience for it until he receives the early and the latter rain [James 5:7]. Be you also patient.

2 When we are running towards a goal remote or what we do not see, we think we do not advance because we do not reach it, and because the place to which we tend is not within our view. But yet every step we take is an abatement of the distance, and provided we do not tire, provided we neither stop nor slacken our pace, provided the despair of ever getting to our intended home does not make us go back, all infallibly reap in our last day's journey the whole benefit of those which we so long looked on as lost and fruitless.

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1 There are favors reserved for latter times, as in the order of nature there are fruits for latter seasons, and those favors are commonly the most important. We must wait for the moment of receiving them, the choice of which is not in our power, and the disposal of which God has reserved to himself alone. We must work and sow all night long as the apostles are said in the gospel to have done, and we must hope that the last moments will recompense all the toil which we before had looked upon as useless. Our Savior had constrained his apostles notwithstanding their reluctance to enter without him into a ship and to go to the opposite shore of the Galilean Sea. A violent and contrary wind opposed their endeavors and they imagined that their toil was unknown to their master though it was perfectly present to him, as St. Mark observes [6:45-52; also Matt. 14:22-33; John 6:15-21]: he saw them toiling in rowing. Towards the end of the night Jesus at last came to them walking upon the sea, which they so little expected that they were all frightened, and cried out as if he had been a spirit. After he had removed all their fears by talking with them, they willingly received him into their ship. And though they had as yet made but a small part of their passage, the ship was immediately at the land whither they went. The inward and spiritual miracle whereof this history is only a type, is more ordinary and common than we think. We row with all our strength, and make but little way. A violent and [gap in MS] wind happens to resist and overpower all our efforts, we think ourselves alone and without Jesus Christ, nay we imagine he has abandoned us, and we scarce know him again when he offers himself at break of day. But his words at last perfectly restore our peace, and his presence procures us in an instant all the comfort and satisfaction that has been deferred till his coming. The wind ceases, the oars become perfectly useless. We in short are at land without knowing how. But this sudden and unexpected success depends on our having wrought without ceasing to the last instant.

2 Besides these examples which respect the best peoples whom [destroyed in page-fold in MS] informs in what they fell short of perfection, while at the same time he grants it by making them more pure and humble, there are examples of another kind which are fit for such as lie long in a weak, drooping and languishing condition but who for all that do not quit their courage and remain constantly by the pool as the paralytic till he was eight and thirty years old did, without being tired with waiting [John 5:2-9]. Though their expectation seems to be in vain, and nobody appears under any concern for their health or offers to throw them into the pool when it is moved by the angel. It is for such that it was written in one

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of the books of wisdom: trust in the Lord and abide in thy labor, for it is an easy thing in the sight of the Lord on the sudden to make a poor man rich. The secret of the Lord is unknown to us, and nothing but the end and term of it make it manifest. One would be apt to think on seeing the happy beginnings of certain persons that their election is undoubted. On the contrary, one would naturally be apt to despair of the salvation of some others, in seeing how far they deviate from it during their first years. But the unaccountable delays of the former, and the miraculous resurrection of the latter, informs us by the event how fallible our conjectures were.

3 Thou hast kept the good wine until now [John 2:10].