

SIGNS OF THE MORNING

They were heavy tidings for Zion that were proclaimed by Jeremiah in the portion read from his prophecies this morning:

“A voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from Mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voices against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the Lord. Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee: this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart . . . Thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled. . . . My people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

“The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste without an inhabitant” (Jer. 4: 15-22, 7).

The prophets are full of such terrible forewarnings and declarations of coming evil. The judgments foretold have all been accomplished, and for long dreary centuries, the world has been witness of the desolation that has reigned in a land once fertile and full of human activity and joy; and a beholder and inflictor of the ignominy that has for ages been the portion of an exiled race, once the honoured inhabitants of the Lord's land.

In this we are interested as words cannot express. Assembled this morning as the children of Zion (for we are such by adoption, though not of Jewish blood), to call to remembrance the death of Zion's king, it is part of our joy to re-contemplate the hope that God has given us concerning the end of Zion's desolation, at His manifestation in power and great glory. They are no vain words that we sing when we say,

“The Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”

Such is the declaration of the word of inspiration. Yahweh, who hath established the desolation, will bring to pass revival and prosperity and the gladness. So He hath promised, as we know.

“He hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” (Hos. 6:1).

“In my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee” (Isa. 60:10).

“He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jer. 31:10).

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer” (Isa. 54:7-8).

The desolation of Israel seems a small thing in the estimation of the children of the present world. They do not realise what glories were involved in the Mosaic constitution which God gave to

Israel. They do not know the wretchedness that results to the human race from the absence of divine government. They cannot appreciate the unutterable goodness that will come to all people with the rebuilding of the house of David, and the extension of its shadowing power to every country under heaven. The truth, if we have learnt it in its fulness, has taught us all these things, and, therefore, leads us to sigh and cry for the day of promise, when the Lord's land will no longer be desolate; when Yahweh's people will no longer be wanderers in the earth, when the nations of the world will no longer walk after the imagination of their evil hearts, but will rejoice in the law that will go forth to the ends of the earth from David's Son, enthroned in glorified Zion. To such as thus mourn for Jerusalem, the words are addressed:

*"Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, **all ye that mourn for her**: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem"* (Isa. 66:10-13).

Is it a wonder that we should "pray for the peace of Jerusalem"? How can we, with the knowledge of what God has purposed concerning her, be interested in any other prosperity than the prosperity of her palaces in which God is known for a refuge? It is something far higher than Jewish patriotism that enables us to use the language of Psalm 137:

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

Her night has been long and dark and bitter.

She has *"drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury. She has drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out"* (Isa. 51:17).

She lies speechless on the ground. But there is an end to her affliction. Yahweh commanded his servant Isaiah to speak comfortably to Jerusalem and to cry unto her, that her warfare should be accomplished, her iniquities pardoned, when she should have received of the hand of the Lord enough for all her sins (Isa. 40:1). Again, saith he.

"Hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine . . . Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee."

How long she should have to suffer was not at that time revealed. Jesus referred to the period of her affliction, saying she should be *"trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled"* (Luke 21:24). The duration of these times of downtreading, characterised also by Gentile ascendancy, was approximately foreshown to Daniel and John. By the light of what was revealed to them, we are enabled to be assured that the time of deliverance is at hand—nay, that the time definitely appointed for desolation, is in the past.

In this conviction, we have been watching the horizon of Zion's night for a long time for signs of the coming dawn. We have not watched in vain. For a long time there has been a little light on the sky-line, very faint and dull, to be sure; but still distinguishable from the inky-black overhead. Now and then, there has been a visible increase in this faint light, till, with the Montefiore scheme, it began to amount to a streak. This, however, seemed to fade away before the storms of Eastern conflict. Great clouds covered the horizon altogether from sight. The scheme was in abeyance, and

the power of the desolator of the land seemed for a moment, with the Russian reverses at Zewin and Plevna (in Asia and Europe), likely to be strengthened, and the dawn of hope to be postponed. The storm at last spent itself. The lightnings ceased to rage; the torrents abated their downpour; with the Berlin Congress, the midnight sky has cleared, and lo! The horizon is lighted up as it has never been lit before.

Britain has thrown her shadow over Yahweh's land. The Turkish desolator is no longer at liberty to work his will. Though nominally he is still the sovereign of the realm, a new power is blended with his which insists upon, and will compel, order, security, tranquillity, and development in the lands desolate for generations. The way is, then, clear for the preliminary work of Israel's reviving, and already the process, arrested by war, is resumed. You may have read in the Jewish Chronicle that the Montefiore committee has issued orders to the agent appointed to represent it at Jerusalem to proceed to the Holy Land, after previously visiting London, to consult with regard to the steps to be taken for the purchase of land, and the erection of houses for agricultural and industrial occupation by the Jews. You may have read that the Jews regard this English Protectorate—made real by the occupation of the Bible island of Cyprus—as equivalent to the proclamation of Cyrus—

“Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up.”

You may have read that they expect that the Holy Land, under this protectorate, will become a harbour of refuge to the thousands of Israel throughout the world, whose yearnings are directed to the land of their fathers, but whom, hitherto, Turkish rapacity and Greek and Latin fanaticism have deterred from directing their steps thither.

What is all this but the struggling dawn of Israel's coming day of glory? It is what we have been looking for, for years and years. It is, in fact, the last item of the long list of latter-day signs which have all, one by one, been gradually realised. A brother thus speaks of it in a recent letter: - “It gives more real satisfaction and solid comfort than any political event that I can remember for the last twelve years. It is a fitting sequel to the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, and like it, is unaccompanied with the horrors of war. The Austro-Prussian war was interesting for the time being; but its full object was not immediately apparent. It is true that it led to a breach with the Papacy, but we had to wait until 1870-71 to see that it was necessary, in order to strengthen Prussia for the overthrow of the French Empire and the withdrawal of her troops from Rome. In our anxious voyage, these were like islands in the ocean, indicating that we were getting nearer to the mainland; and the events of the Russo-Turkish war have been like a series of startling rockets sent from the unseen shore; but, by the English occupation of Cyprus and Protectorate over Asiatic Turkey, we are positively brought within sight of land. The distance between it and us is still uncertain—for measurement by the eye across water surface is generally deceptive. But we now know that the beacons and headlands are nearly all passed, and that, consequently, there is but little more to do in looking at these marine milestones, the best occupation being the gathering together and packing of those things necessary for disembarkation when the harbour is reached. Woe unto those who are unable to find all that is required to land on the shore of salvation, or who are indifferent to the rules of the landing stage! Too late! Too late! Will then be their only reception. I pray that we may be spared such a fate.”

The British-Protectorate sign is the one that immediately precedes the reappearance of Christ in the earth. You do not require that I should, on the present occasion, show the Scriptural evidence of this. You are well acquainted with it. You know it is revealed that, first, before the unbarring of Yahweh's arm in judgment upon the nations of the earth, there would be a partial gathering of Israel to their land, effected by natural means, and under the protecting shadow of the Merchant and Lion power of Britain's shadowing wings. You know that it is against this infant, protected, and rapidly

prospering colony, that the Russian Gog descends like a storm in his conflict with the merchants of Tarshish; you know that the Russian Gog triumphs in this invasion, and that it is when he is in the full flood-tide of victory that the Lord makes his first public appearance in the affairs of the world, miraculously overthrowing the power of the invader, driving the marauding hosts out of the country, and setting up again the kingdom of David on the long-desolate mountains of Judah. When he thus appears you know that the saints are with him. From this you know that they must have joined him in the preceding interval—that is, the interval between the beginning of the partial restoration of Israel and the stormy downrush of Gog to overthrow the land. Because that interval has now in a manner begun, you are looking at any time for the summons to depart and meet the Lord. How long that interval will be we have no means of knowing. Whether the Lord will come this year or next, or even in five years, or even let us say in ten, we know not. But it is cheering to our hearts to see the unmistakeable tokens that he is at the door. Beware of the folly of saying, *“My Lord delayeth coming.”* He may not delay longer. We may not see the year out. We have no guide as to the length of time to be occupied by the Lord in the setting of his house in order in judgment. There are millions to be judged, and all must give account. After the account and the separation of the two classes—the accepted and the rejected—there may be a season of communion between the Lord and his glorified brethren, in the presence of the thousands of angels who accompany him at his return. All this may require time enough to necessitate an immediate commencement. Dr. Thomas’ suggestion may prove correct—that the work of the partial restoration of the Jews and the work of judging the house of Christ in the recesses of Teman, are operations that may go on together. If so, the establishment of an English Protectorate in Asia Minor, and the beginning of the work of Jewish revival in the Holy Land, say to us with a plainness never before illustrated:

“Behold, the Judge standeth at the door.”

It is a juncture of affairs that will affect us with joy or fear, according as we have been living in harmony or otherwise with the calling to which, by the Gospel, we have been called. If we have consented to accept the part of strangers and sojourners with Christ, estimating and conducting ourselves as his stewards, making his commandments the rule of our lives, bearing testimony to him, and occupying in his service, in the midst of a world that denies him and dishonours God, all the while fostering our affections for the glorious hope that will be realised in his appearing, then we shall naturally conform to Christ’s own suggestion: seeing these things, we shall *“lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh.”* If, on the other hand, while knowing and assenting to the facts concerning Christ, we have lived negligently of his commandments, consulting present ease and comfort, and accepting the smiles of a world that disowns him, we may reasonably regard the prospect with apprehension. If we have laid up our treasure on earth, we cannot be surprised that Christ comes empty-handed for us from heaven. If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. There is yet time. Let us examine ourselves. Let us judge our own selves. If the record of the past does not appear satisfactory, it is high time to repent and do the first works. If, on the other hand, we can say with Paul, that the *“testimony of our conscience”* is, that *“in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,”* we have cause to rejoice at the tokens in the eastern horizon, which tell us of the approaching rise of the Sun of Righteousness, to fill the world with light and glory.

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