

SOJOURNING IN FEAR AWAITING CHRIST

David says: “*Our days upon earth are as a shadow;*” John, that “*the world passeth away*”; James, that “*our life is but a vapour that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away.*” The Bible uniformly holds this fact in the front. The Bible is not therefore a gloomy book. It appears so to some people, only because they lack the mental habit of noting truth. The Bible deals with facts rather than fancies, and appeals to sober discernment rather than sensation. In this it is the sweetest book under the sun, for truth is sweet, even if it sometimes has an ugly side. The happiest men are those who delight in truth and know it.

The transitoriness of the life we now live is part of the Truth. It comes home with more striking force at some times than others.

It is so with us all.

“Time and change are busy ever: man decays,
and ages move.”

Wise men note the fact and adjust themselves to it; and in this there is no gloom. The real gloom is with those who shut their eyes to the fact, and drown the sense of it in frivolous occupations and delights. The time comes, sooner or later, when they can no longer shut their eyes, and when pleasure loses its power to charm away the horrors of sin and death which are quietly with us whether we give attention or not.

We turn our attention from the transitory and the apparent to the everlasting and real. These are exhibited to us in our readings of the Scriptures. Nowhere else can we meet them at present. The day will come when they will be displayed on earth in the living power of actuality. Meanwhile we make their acquaintance here beforehand, as a matter of information and faith. Let us get as close as possible. They are our life. They all cluster in Christ, who has no meaning apart from them. Looking at him with discernment we see the whole truth, which is not visible in natural life and which the world cares not for. We see God first of all, for it was of the Father that Jesus had most to say. He had come from the Father and was returning to Him, and had for his business meanwhile the doing of the work which He had given him to do. To the world this is the least interesting part of the Truth. Nay, it is odious to them. As Jesus said in prayer,

“*The world hath not known Thee.*”

What men do not know, they have no interest in. How dreadful to be ignorant of God. As Jesus said again,

“*This is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*”

This that is odious to the world is the most precious part of the Truth to the children of God. The most grievous feature of the evil state of things now prevailing on the earth, to this class, is the absence of God’s visible manifestation, and the absence of all desire for it among men. David stands as their type:

“*My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*”

This that is considered as the mere objurgation of sentimental piety, is the expression of the highest reason. Reason thoroughly applied, bores its way down to the Eternal Rock, or ascends the long line of causation to the First Cause; and here it finds the root of all life, and

excellence, and power; and with communion and recognition here alone can it be satisfied. And what form of communion? Not the intercourse of equals. Nay, worship; reverence, adoration, praise.

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory.”

Man prostrate in adoration; man on his knees in supplication; man lost in an ecstasy of admiration and praise—this is the attitude of reason: for—

“Of Him and to Him and through Him are all things.”

The Psalms which we have lately been reading give us the right clue. They are full of God.

“Praise ye the Lord, Praise ye the name of the Lord, Praise Him ye servants of the Lord: Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises unto His name for it is pleasant.”

This is the state of mind we have to rise to as brethren and sisters of Christ; for it is the Father’s predestination that they be “conformed to the image of His son,” and we know that Christ was not behind David in the fervour of his admiration of the eternal Father. The world is getting more and more away from this attitude, for with the vanishing of the old superstitions and the diffusion of a correct knowledge of nature and natural law, unaccompanied with a real knowledge of revealed truth, there is setting in a cold, undevout temper which is unfavourable to the recognition of god in any real sense. We are in danger of being infected by this spirit, which is a spirit of godlessness, with however many human graces accompanied. The only models are in the Bible; and among them all, David and Christ stand first in that living sense of God which is the first principle of true godliness. Looking at Christ, the next thing we see is the temporariness of all present relations as estimated by him—a sense as if passing on, as of getting through, as of hastening to a goal. He did not rest on this life as the bulk of men do. He did not aim at achieving anything in it, beyond the using of it for the purpose in hand—the finishing of the work god had given him to do. His objective was always beyond. In this his true brethren also resemble him. It is expressed by Paul when he says:

“We have here no continuing city: we seek one to come,” and again, *“Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God,”* and again, *“our citizenship is in heaven,”* and again, by Peter, *“Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”*

This attitude also is the attitude of pure reason. It is only the ignoring of facts that leads to any other. Men with a distinct sense of the ephemeral and fleeting nature of life as it now is would not set their affections upon it as they do. Men with a strong desire for and faith in the life that is coming would not, and could not, devote themselves, as nearly all men do, to the present world. Most men lack this sense and this faith, and yet both are in harmony with indestructible facts. All realise it sooner or later. In the midst of their struggles and their successes, they are bound to feel sometime or other the unhappiness of having no goal beyond the horizon of present efforts. Friends die; circumstances change; strength fails, and they are made to see, in spite of themselves, the truth of John’s words that *“the world passeth away.”* And as for that which is to come, what man but rudimentarily acquainted with the history of the past can entertain a serious doubt that the world is marching on to a different state from that which now prevails? Who can shut his eyes to the scattered Jews? Who can ignore the bible? Who can deny the Holy Land? Who can remove the name of Christ from the civilisation of the world? And what man of reason acquainted with these things can resist the conclusion they jointly yield, that there is a future for man and for the earth as much higher than the present state as it is lower than that which wisdom and goodness desire?

It is then, but the act of enlightened reason to accept the position which Christ occupied in the present world—that of a stranger—a pilgrim—one not settled to policy rooted in the present—one whose life, whose aims, whose love and aspirations are in the future. Such a choice seems fanatical only to those who are unacquainted with its grounds. It is due to no natural moroseness. It is not the result of any tendency to asceticism. The sons of God are the most cheerful and sociable of men when the right conditions exist. It they *“have here no continuing city,”* it is not because they are insensible to the attractions of polished life. It is precisely the reverse. It is because the life in the world is not polished enough in the true sense that they *“love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”* It lacks the true salt of life in lacking the manifested presence of god and any desire towards Him—which are the root of true well-being. This indeed is the great evil of the times—the characteristics and fundamental defect and deformity of the present evil state. It might seem as if this were not so. It might seem as if the great evil of the present state were death—as if the one great thing needed were the change of our corruptible bodies into the uncorruptible and immortal. On reflection however, it will appear that the disease is deeper. Our afflicted state of life (ending in death) is but a fruit on the tree. What is the cause? This, that God has hidden His face from the human race and left them to shift for themselves instead of leading them by the hand and shining upon them in all the ways of His favour. When God shows His face again (as He has promised He will); when He takes mankind in charge and bestows upon them laws and institutions adapted to develop and bless them (as He has covenanted to do); when the proclamation becomes a fact that John heard in the isle of Patmos:

“Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God,”—

death and all other evils that now prevail upon the earth will soon fly away. Evil came because God withdrew: when God returns, evil will flee.

Now, the world is without God. It would be some compensation if in the midst of the evil, the world loved God, and worshipped and served Him. It would be some attraction to the friends of god if the world delighted in Him and sought earnestly after His ways. Instead of this, how is it—that *“the wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.”* Consequently, both in fact and in sentiment the world as it now exists is *“the world of the ungodly.”* How then can the friends of God be anything else than strangers and pilgrims? They love society and the joy of communion, but they cannot accept these things at the hand of a community of whom it is divinely written, that *“the friendship of the world is enmity with God.”* Though the friends of God have *“here no continuing city,”* they do *“seek (ardently and earnestly) one to come.”* They know it is coming though there are no tokens of its approach visible to merely natural men. They know it will come, however long they may have to wait for it, yea though they wait to the utter weariness of mortal nature, and lie down with the silvered hair of age to rest. And they well know it is worth waiting for, both as regards nature and duration. What is testified of Abraham is true of them all; *“he looked for a city having foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.”* The *“city”* (polity) of the present world has man for its builder and maker; consequently, it is evil and transitory, and unworthy of the aim and labour of a man’s life. But the city that Abraham looked for, and which all his children will inherit with him, will be an institution of divine contrivance and that will not pass away at all.

“The God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom.”

If so, it will bear the stamp of the wisdom reflected in heaven and earth. He has set a kingdom up once already in the history of Adam’s race. Though it was provisional and

shadowy, the order of things established in Israel when they came out of Egypt under Moses is the only political constitution the world has ever seen that is perfectly adapted to promote the full well-being of man in a mortal state. If it be thus with a kingdom established in a confessedly imperfect order of things, what may we not look for when the time has come for the full blessedness of all nations covenanted to Abraham? It is part of the unutterable sadness of the civilisation now upon earth that the only man regarded as “practical” and wise is the man who dismisses all hopes of life ever being a noble and intellectual thing among men; and who grimly accepts as inevitable the dark and sinister state of things now prevalent. If God had revealed no purpose, the logic of this cynicism would be irresistible. There is evidently no hope for man, or any system he can devise. Divine wisdom backed with divine power is what is needed. This is promised in the gospel preached to Abraham and to many since his day; and to those who believe it, a different aspect is thrown on human prospects altogether. There is hope on the horizon. A stable system of human life will yet appear on the earth—a system in which the highest ideals will be realised. A government composed of righteous and immortal and omnipotent men, under one responsible King and Head, will be established in the land of promise over all countries of the world. It will be composed of men who have gone through life before—men with a history—men who have known the world’s woes and the world’s wickedness—men who have in the days of darkness and despair steadfastly upheld the honour of God and have sought to promote the well-being of man in the only limited way possible to their weakness. These *‘redeemed from among men,’* in the previous generations, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets for their nucleus, and Christ for their Head and Centre, will reign with power, and joy and honour for ever. Among themselves will prevail the ideal conditions now laughed at as a dream; and among the nations of the earth will grow up under their strong and beneficent rule, all the happy fruits of life that are now cursed, and blighted and killed under every form of government under the sun. Plenty, and health, and wisdom will give gladness to the new life to which mankind will awake under the government of *“the city having foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.”*

It is written that *“for the joy set before him, Christ endured the cross, despising the shame.”* No empty words of sentiment are these. They express the gladsome reality of the Kingdom of God when it shall have come. And they define the present policy naturally arising out of faith in it. It is a policy in which the fathers preceded all their children, as expressed in the words of Paul:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

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Pages 95-100

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