

RIGHT VIEWS OF LIFE

The matters presented in the portions of Scripture read this morning, if thoroughly realised, will greatly help us to form right views of life. It is of a very great importance to have right views of life. There is a tendency in modern times to deprecate this idea. It is common for people of advanced sentiments, as they imagine, to scout all care about “views” one way or other. They say, “Out upon your ‘views’; go home and eat your dinner, and sleep, and enjoy yourself, and don’t trouble about ‘views.’” It only requires a very little reflection to see the unwisdom and absurdity of this. “Views” constitute the basis of personal acceptability or otherwise everywhere. What is the essential difference between a man you love and a man you cannot love? It will be found to lie in the state of his mind. The mental perceptions and appreciations of the one, as expressed in his words and manners and doings, create a sense of acceptability and delight which is not at all excited by the other, who, on the contrary, excites aversion and disgust by his want of these. What is the difference between an intelligent man, whose company gives you pleasure, and an idiot who creates loathing? They are both the same in some points. They both have arms and legs, mouth, nose, and eyes, and yet how differently they affect you. It is not a difference of beauty, for an idiotic-looking person, who is intelligent and wise, will evoke your love, while a person ever so beautiful in a classic sense, will fail to interest you if he lacks intelligence. No, it is a difference of “views,” understanding this in the widest sense of intellectual recognitions.

Now, this rule, holding good among men, holds good also in our divine relations. It is a matter of revelation, whether we like it or not, that God takes pleasure in wise men, and *“hath no pleasure in fools.”*

“The foolish shall not stand in thy presence.”

“The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools.”

“Be not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

The foolish virgins found the door shut.

“Be not like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding.”

Such is the almost universal drift of Scripture teaching. Consequently, so far from “views” of life being unimportant, they are of the first consequence for good or evil. Right views are to be sought carefully after, with the diligence a man bestows on everything affecting his life in a common sense. Right views acted out are our life: wrong views, death.

Wrong views are natural, because without special information, we cannot help coming to wrong or uncertain conclusions from what we see. We see life an aimless journey from the cradle to the grave, if we are to judge by the sight of our eyes. A man, with much toil and anxiety, conducts himself to old age, and dies, and is forgotten. We see this in the untold millions of cases in the past. We see it going on around us. We see no exception. What is the impression it makes—what is the “view” it gives us apart from special information? Why, that it is of no use troubling about anything:

“Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die:”

Let us take all the pleasure we can while we live, for we came out of darkness and go soon to darkness again, and to darkness for ever. What a depressing, demoralising, degrading “view” this would be: a view that would soon destroy us; a view, natural, judging from what we can see for ourselves, yet a view untrue to facts that have not come within the range of our actual vision, but which have been within the range of other people’s vision, and which have been credibly testified to us—yea, more, which have left marks in certain phases of human history which can be seen and deciphered by all who are concerned for the formation of right views.

These remarks apply to individual life: but they are true also of larger matters. They are true of national life. History, to the eye of a merely contemporary observer, seems a

chaos, without plan, without result, a meaningless struggle—an endless repetition of little incidents, without a goal in the progress of the ages. Let a man give in to this view, and he will be dwarfed and withered by it. He will consider only the exigencies of the passing hour, and respond only to ideas of self-interest and consult his pleasure alone. His natural tendency to stuntedness and smallness will be increased by the powerful super-incumbent pressure of this intensely dreary “view.”

We shall be helped in the struggle for right views by trying to realise the matters and facts presented in the three portions read this morning. In the first we see David in the centre of busy scenes, arising out of the organization and establishment of his kingdom after the death of Saul. The tribes come to him from various parts. The Levitical families offer their allegiance. In conjunction with them he conveys the ark of God, with much circumstance of pomp and gladness, from one part of the land to another, and sets it in the midst of a tent he had pitched for it, and offers sacrifice. He organises the Levites into orders for alternate service in the courts of the tabernacle. Some are musical one way; some another. All are in hearty harmony with the business in hand. David delivers into their hands a noble psalm, which they sing to instrumental accompaniment, and all the people joyfully say, “Amen!” That is the picture we get a glimpse of as we look into the past through the particular window we stand at in the reading of the 15th chapter of 1 Chronicles.

Now, looking at that picture, we ask, What is the meaning of it? How came David there? How came the tribes to be in the land? How came they to be engaged with the ark; and how came they to be offering sacrifice and singing praise with joy? When these questions are rationally answered, we get facts which throw light on the apparent darkness of human history. We see God on the scene with a plan shaping and guiding the chaos to an appointed end. We see him invite Abraham from his native country, and covenant to him everlasting possession of the land of Canaan. We see Jacob and his family go down to Egypt, and sojourn there till they become a numerous community oppressed of the Egyptians, as their descendants are today in the European countries. We see Moses appear on the scene and show the world the great marvel of an unorganised race of serfs delivered from the grasp of a great military nation by an interposition of power from without on their behalf—power of an unnatural sort—power that paralysed all human resistance in the infliction of noisome plagues, and the ravages of the angel of death. We see this defenceless assembly cross the Red Sea followed by their pursuers, who are destroyed in the returning waters. We see them wandering, with apparently aimless feet, among the wasteness of a barren peninsula, among whose frowning hills they encamp and murmur. We see them sit down at the foot of Sinai, from whose cloud-invested summit, amid darkness, and earthquake, and flame, they hear the voice of God proclaim commandments for their observance. After a twelve months’ encampment, we see them strike their tents and march. We see them arrive on the borders of the land of promise. We see them despatch twelve men to spy the land. We see them receive the spies and listen to their report, and then we see the whole congregation break out into a mutiny against Moses and Aaron, refusing to go forward, and proposing the stoning of Moses and a return to the land of Egypt. We see the glory of the Lord flame out blindingly before them, arresting their madness, rescuing Moses from their hands, and sentencing the whole congregation to a forty years’ sojourn in the wilderness. The forty years at an end, we see them cross the Jordan under Joshua, and carry all before them, destroying the Canaanitish inhabitants, and settling down in their place. We see them turn aside to idol worship, and brought under the harrows of affliction in consequence, from which they are repeatedly delivered, till God raised them up David to be their king.

As we reflect on these things, and trace the story downwards on the stream of time to our own day, when the land lies desolate and the people are everywhere in dispersion, and forward (not far forward, thanks be to God) to the appointed restoration of the kingdom of

Israel under the Son covenanted to David, we have enlightened “views” formed within us which neutralise and destroy the views of the natural man touching the chaos of all human things. We see that human history is not the unmitigated vanity it seems. We see that the hand of God is in it, and as we contemplate the consummation exhibited in the prophetic delineations of the glorious future to which he is guiding affairs on earth, we take heart amid the despondencies of the merely natural mind, and adapt ourselves to the new and enlightening “views” with strengthened hand and ennobled heart, waiting for God in the season of his appointed visitation.

Help of the same sort, though not in the same form, comes to us with the portions read from Ezekiel 27 and 28). Here we are introduced to the most reliable picture which ancient history furnishes of the maritime and commercial greatness of the Britain of ancient days. The Phoenicia of profane historians—whose power and riches were concentrated in the seaport of Tyre, is addressed in this chapter. The picture is full of detail, and life, and colour. There is a glimpse of the various countries, and lands, and people that traded with Tyre, and a description of the articles of merchandise they contributed to the Tyrian fairs. As the result of her busy commerce, Tyre became rich; and, as a result of her riches, she became proud. So Yahweh here tells her:

“With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: by thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches.”

Now, this is a common picture among the peoples and nations of the present day; and the spectacle of their undisturbed, unrighteous might is liable to trouble righteous minds. Because of this, how profitable to listen to the divine estimate of these things in the case of Tyre:

“Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God, behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas.”

And so it came to pass. Tyre was prevailed against by enemies that God raised up against her, and all her glory vanished, and her very existence came to an end. The relics of her departed greatness are now to be seen at the bottom of the sea on a clear day, in the neighbourhood of the spot which was once the centre of universal commerce, and the seat of much power and pride.

The application of these facts to our own day must be obvious in view of the existence of just precisely the same state of things. We are here in the midst of a small but great country, exercising a wide empire. Britain is the centre of the world’s commerce. By reason of her wisdom in a variety of directions, she has multiplied riches; and because of her riches her heart is lifted up. Pride and arrogance prevail on every hand. It is considered the right sentiment to foster, nationally and individually. Successful commerce is looked at as the result of skill wisely applied, and a man is considered to be justified in being proud of his abilities, and, therefore, of their results. The popular philosophy on this point is very shallow. The true key is struck in the words of Moses to Israel on the plains of Moab, on the eve of their entry into the land of promise. He told them of the prosperity that awaited them in the event of obedience, and then cautioned them against wrong “views” on the subject: He told them to beware, lest in the midst of their prosperity, they should say,

“My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:17).

This is the true view of the case. Consequently, pride, national or individual, on account of prosperity, is an unreasonable thing. The true attitude is that of thankfulness to God, and mercy to man; but as for pride, it ought to be put far away. It is an absurd and hateful thing. If it is so to man, it is much more so to God. He has declared his hatred of it in all the Scriptures. His hatred of it is exhibited to all the world in the absolute nonentity of Tyre in the present day. Tyre once proudly flaunted her glory and her greatness in the face of heaven, as Britain does today. He brought her to nought because of her pride, as is declared to us in the oracle read from Ezekiel. And God has not changed. And Britain also will come under the same retribution. It is written that—

“The Lord of Hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.”

The image vision of Daniel shows that this is intended in the most comprehensive sense. Consequently, are we not enabled to wait patiently for God? It is written,

“They shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

Waiting may be trying; it is intended to be: but it will not be destructive to a wise man. Such a man knows that God is great, and the ages long, and that man has no claim to existence, and that it is a privilege to stand by any length of time and see how God works out his purpose.

“Though the vision tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.”

The prosperity of the wicked will come to an end. The pride of those who neither fear God nor regard man will not always rear itself unmolested in the earth. The day will come, and that not a long distant day, when Yahweh will arise and shake terribly the earth, and bring down the haughty, and save and exalt all the meek who tremble at His greatness, fear His word, hope in His mercy, and wait on His purpose. The condition of Tyre today is a guarantee. It was very unlikely in the day of her power that her greatness would ever be disturbed. Now behold her—a desolation, scarcely to be identified in the land of the living—a deserted place of ruins where fishermen spread their nets, as was foretold. As we look, let us ponder and mentally assimilate the only right views in the case. Let us refuse to be compromised in the general insanity of the people. Let us repudiate, in our own practice, their principles and habits of pride, and indifference, and worldliness. Let us remember that the glory of the present order is a passing scene which will soon have vanished as completely as a dream of the night; while the glory of the world to come will be lasting as the universe, and delightful as the wildest poetical conception.

We have another guarantee of this consummation, in the third portion of the word read this morning (Gal. 1). In this case we have Paul, the apostle, speaking to us. On this point, there is not the least doubt. No one, except the blasphemer, whose heart does not go with his words, denies or in the least doubts, that the words read in our hearing this morning were written by Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, whose head was taken off by the emperor Nero, because of his leadership of the hated Christians. What are his words?

“I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

On what grounds does Paul make this claim to a divine origin of the gospel he preached? He recites these grounds several times in speeches recorded in the apostolic history. He constantly laments the fact that he was once a persecutor. He takes consolation in the fact that he persecuted with a righteous motive, but in ignorance of the truth. He told the Jews over and over again how he ceased to be a persecutor, and became a preacher of the faith he once destroyed. In brief, he says it was because he had seen the lord Jesus. He recites the circumstance, so as to show it was real. There was no room for deception or mistake. It happened exactly in the way to exclude the possibility of mistake. It happened, not at night, but in the full blaze of noonday. It did not happen when he was by himself, but when he was

in the midst of a retinue of officials who were witnesses of the strange phenomenon. It did not affect him only, but threw them all to the ground. It was not a sensation limited to himself; they were all overpowered by the light, and heard the voice that addressed Paul, though they could not make out the words. It did not pass off, and leave no effect; it sealed Paul's eyes, and left him blind. It did not remain isolated from a logical sequel, as a hallucination might be supposed to do; the leading professor of the faith of Christ visited Saul, while yet with closed eyes, and cured his blindness, and this logical sequel was independent of Saul's volition or knowledge (and, therefore, unconnected with any such hallucination as his enemies suppose him to have been the subject of), for the said leading professor—Ananias—came independently of any message from Saul, and purely as the result of supernatural instructions from Christ to do so, to which he raised objections in the first instance, on the ground of Saul's notorious enmity to Christ. When, after all these facts are weighed and considered, we come to look at Paul's life, consider Paul's apostolic success, and read Paul's wonderful epistles, there is only one conclusion left for earnest logic, and that is, that Paul's testimony in the first chapter of Galatians is true; that the gospel he preached was not in any sense a human affair, but a gospel emanating from God, and founded on facts as palpable as our present existence.

Here is a powerful contribution to enlightened "views," for if these things are so, then Christ lives, and Christ is coming, and the future belongs to him, and the present is only wisely used when used in harmony with his mind and will. Animated by such views as these, a man will not be content to live as if he had no future. He will not be content to live simply as he inclines as a natural man. He will not be content to remain in ignorance of the will of Christ, or in indifference to it when he knows it. He will not be content to live for present objects and present enjoyments. He will rise superior to the pressures and appearances of this passing life. He will take the mental attitude expressed in Paul's question when the Lord met him:

"Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?"

He will study the commandments of Christ and the law of the Lord, and he will aim to carry them out with a steady hand and a firm step, regardless of human opinions or human consequences.

"Consequences" may be often unpleasant—yea, worse than unpleasant—hurtful, even deadly. This the apostles found, who suffered the loss of all things, and paid the last tribute of faithfulness on the executioner's block. But shall we shrink from submission to Christ because of the results? How, in that case, shall we be fit to stand with those Apocalyptically revealed in glory as those who loved not their lives to the death? Nay, nay, let us heed the Lord's exhortation who says,

"Be thou faithful unto death"

—Not that we shall necessarily go to death; but be prepared for that in case of need. The mode of tribulation is graduated and diversified according to the endless variations of individual requirement. The Lord knoweth them that are his: and he knows how much and what sort of tribulation each case requires. Let us humble ourselves under his mighty hand with this confidence.

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."

This is the counsel of eternal wisdom: it is founded on the highest reason and goodness. Tribulation is a moral necessity. We cannot be brought into a reasonable state without it. Paul defines its mission thus:

"Tribulation worketh patience;"

And through much tribulation it is appointed we must enter the kingdom of God. The wisdom of it is not difficult to see. Humility and patience are indispensable attributes of excellence of

character. They are characteristic of the angels, to equality with whom the gospel invites us, and who have known evil in their day. They come only with tribulation. They do not come with luxury and indulgence. The silver spoon usually generates pride and impatience. Tribulation drives those out of the natural man, and helps us to come more and more into that state in which God will be able to find pleasure in us, and forgive us for Christ's sake, and give us an abiding place in the glorious household of His Son. Recognition of this will enable us to take trouble with a little more composure than if we supposed it were a pure and aimless evil. It is by no means such. It is pre-eminently among the "*all things*" which "*work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose.*"

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