

## **SUNDAY MORNING NO. 119**

During the past week, there has been much casting up of mire and dirt from the bottom of the ocean. It is the Scriptures that say—

*“The wicked are like a troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt.”*

We have seen the saying illustrated in the popular upheavings consequent on the general election that has been going on. As the brethren of Christ, we should have no interest in these motions of the turbid sea around us were it not for their relation to another ocean movement described by the prophet Isaiah, when he speaks of a *“multitude of many people making a noise like the noise of the seas, and a rushing of nations like the rushing of mighty waters.”* This belongs to the latter day, as the context shows, and is part of the crisis that witnesses Christ’s return to the earth. It is a different movement of the waters from what we have seen during the past week. It is a rush of a different sort—a military rush—a rush of armed nations to fight against the Lamb when manifested on Mount Zion at the head of the 144,000.

But it is preceded by events of which the electoral upheaving that is going on has an important bearing on the situation that is in process of development in the East. This, in a special sense, is appreciated in every capital of Europe. Every statesman—every crowned head—every European government is watching its progress with a strained and eager interest. So are the brethren of Christ, but for a different reason. The men of the present world are anxious about the way in which their special aims and policies will be affected by the issue of the appeal to the verdict of the English people on the foreign policy of the Beaconsfield Government. The brethren of Christ are only anxious to see that government in power that will best promote the events that bear promise of Christ’s return.

From this point of view, some of us were expecting the continuance of the Tory government, as apparently more fitted than the peace-loving and non-intervening Liberals, to do the part appertaining to Britain in the latter days. In this expectation, events have proved us wrong, or, at least, are likely to do so. The Liberals appear to be coming into power with a rush. What shall we say? Why, that this is one of those things to which the maxim applies: “Whatever is, is right.” If the Liberals come into power, it is because the purpose of God requires them. It is not a question of whether the purpose of God is to be carried out or not: it is merely a question of “how.” God’s way of reaching a result is sometimes the most unlikely that could be imagined, and the very opposite to what men would devise. Take for example the arrangement made to preserve the family of Jacob from destruction in a time of dearth—the sending of Joseph into Egypt beforehand. Joseph said to his brethren,

*“God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”*

How did He send him? As a favourite transferred by court influence from the sheep pastures of Syria to the Egyptian metropolis? —as a powerful and prosperous Israelite? The very opposite. Had we been there when God *“sent a man before them”* (Psalm 105:17), we should have seen a broken-hearted boy in the hands of unfeeling slave merchants, on their way to the slave market. We should not have imagined this was God’s sending of a man to preserve a posterity for Israel in the earth. So in many other cases, and so in the matter in hand. Intelligent faith is prepared for any form and disposal of public events that divine wisdom may employ in the execution of the divine purpose. This purpose, in its main features, has been revealed, but not the details leading to it.

The restoration of the house of Israel, under Christ, is as certain as the continuance of the sun, and so is the development of the latter-day situation among the nations of the earth—that will lead up to it; but as to how that situation is to be brought about, we are simply in the position of interested spectators, with differing degrees of discernment. God has given to

some a wonderful penetration of the tendencies of things. Dr. Thomas was a striking illustration of this. His surmises as to the unrevealed process by which the revealed upshot in certain matters would be reached, have been wonderfully verified. The position belonging to most of us is simply that of standing still and watching the providential evolution of the pre-determined results. In this spirit, the interesting event of the general election has been watched. The expectation—(universal in the country)—was that the Beaconsfield Government would come out of the ordeal with renewed strength. This expectation, though entertained by the watchers of the signs of the times, was not very confidently entertained. There was a reservation in favour of the possibility of a Liberal triumph, because of the possibility of the purpose of God requiring their accession in the present posture of events. It was not supposed, however, that the Liberal triumph, if it came, would be so complete. The result is as much a surprise to every one as the Conservative triumph of six years ago. The only conclusion the servants of Christ can come to is that the Liberals are needed to complete the work begun by the Tories. The Liberals would never have done the work that has been done by the Tories: and the Tories, it may be, lack the qualification to carry on to its divinely-appointed issue the work which their advent to power was necessary to lay the foundation for. The Liberals will have a less tender regard for Turkish interests and independence, and will probably apply with a firmer hand the Tory arrangements for reform (affecting a wide stretch of country that includes the Holy Land), which have been allowed to languish from a fear of reforming Turkey entirely off the scene. Probably also, the liberals will keep England out of European strife, where the Tories would have embroiled her, while the finishing touches are being put upon the latter-day development of the Scarlet-Coloured, Seven-Headed, and Ten-Horned Beast that goes into perdition. It is pleasant to see these possibilities in the change that is taking place. It enables us to feel that the advent of the Liberals, so far from involving a further postponement of our cherished hopes, may betoken their imminent realisation. It may be that Mr. Gladstone, more than Beaconsfield, is the man to extend that cooperation of England's power to Christ which is involved in the statement that "*the ships of Tarshish first*" will bring Israel's sons from far, with their silver and their gold. Mr. Gladstone is, doubtless (though only in a traditional way), a fearer of God and a believer in Christ in a heartier way than his rival.

These are interesting views to indulge in: but whatever view we may take, it remains that Christ is nearer with every day's flight. Every European event must tend more and more to pave the way for the event of events on which our hearts have been fixed by the gospel—the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from that event, the affairs of the nations would be of little interest to us. When that event occurs, the politics of the world will suddenly and completely lose their interest. The signs of the times will have lost their significance when the event they are pointing to is no longer a matter of expectation. Their value and their importance are very limited and short lived. We ought to think of this in the midst of all our watchings of them. It is better to be interested in the coming of Christ than to be interested in the signs of the times. It is possible to be interested in the signs of the times and not interested in that to which they stand related. It is better to see a man much in love with Christ and the hope of the kingdom, and in much zeal for his service in the obedience of his commandments, even if he have little understanding of the times, than to see a man well up in the politics of the time of the end but of a callous heart towards the person and work and principles of Christ. Of course, it is better to see both aspects combined, but if there must be extremes, it is better to love Christ and be ready for him, knowing little of the political indications of his approach, than to be abreast of all the signs of the times with but feeble attainments in that saintship which alone will qualify for companionship with Christ in the day of his glory.

This view of the case gives great importance to the exhortation addressed to us by Paul in the portion read from Galatians this morning (chap. 5.)

*“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”*

It may be said that the liberty Paul is speaking of, is a liberty from the Mosaic yoke to which we have never been subject, in which therefore we are in no danger of re-entanglement. The criticism would be perfectly true, but the exhortation is applicable nevertheless. There is a liberty with which Christ has made us free, and there is a yoke of bondage in which we are in danger of being re-entangled. The freedom conferred upon us by Christ is a freedom from sin and all that at last comes of it. Our sins have been forgiven and we have received a part in the heirship of the life and glory of the ages to come. This is a great liberty—a liberation from the grim dominion of death, and a promotion to the rank of sons of God, involving friendship with God and joy in the boundless prospect of unmingled and unutterable goodness that lies before his children. But is there no danger of re-entanglement? Let Peter answer:

*“If after they have escaped **the pollutions of the world**, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again **entangled therein** and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it **to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.**”*—(2 Peter 2:20.)

Here the danger is plainly recognised and its nature defined. We stand in no danger of the Mosaic yoke: but a mere glance will suffice to convince wise men who have escaped the pollutions of the world, of the possibility of being “*again entangled therein and overcome.*”

Surely there ought to be no difficulty in recognising what is meant by “*the pollutions of the world.*” The phrase does not refer to anything appertaining to the physical world. It is not in air, earth or sky that “*the pollutions of the world*” are to be found, but in the world of living people—the world of which John said “*The world lieth in wickedness,*” and further that “*all that is in the world*” is but the incorporation of “*the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life:*” in this world, styled by Peter, “*the world of the ungodly*” (2 Peter 2:5), the pollutions are to be found from which we have escaped and in which we are in danger of being “*again entangled and overcome.*” It is very important to be able to discern these pollutions. It is part of “*pure religion and undefiled,*” as defined by James “*to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.*” How shall we do this if we are unable to discern what this means? The pollution of the world may be recognised in the various lists given in the Scriptures. Jesus categorises them thus:

*“Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride foolishness.”*—(Mark 7:21-22.)

Paul described them thus:

*“All unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, debate, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.”*—(Rom. 1:29.)

He also defines the works of the flesh thus:

*“Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness”* (Gal. 5:19),

Of which he plainly says,

*“They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

The lists demand our careful consideration. On the principal items, we may be pretty safe: but unless we are safe on all points, we are in danger. We may be in comparatively little danger of murder, drunkenness, fornication, and the grosser offences, but what if we are guilty of pride, boasting, wrath, hatred, variance, envy, covetousness, covenant breaking, whispering, backbiting, &c.?

Perhaps we may be disposed to say concerning these commandments, like the young man that came to Jesus, *"All these things have I kept from my youth."* Suppose it be so, there is another test to apply. It is not enough to abstain from evil: we must also be characterised by that which is good. A man is a very neutral and uninteresting sort of character of whom it can only be said, "He is not a bad character." He must have positive good points. There must not only be no weeds: there must be a growth of garden flowers and fruits. What are these? The fruits of the Spirit. What are the fruits of the Spirit? Paul enumerates them in this same chapter:

*"Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."*

This is a beautiful catalogue, in wonderful contrast to the fruits of the flesh. They constitute the portrait of the new man in Christ. They must, in some measure, be exemplified by those who are to be heirs of salvation. They will be possessed in varying degrees by different members of the family, but all will exhibit them in some degree. They are the family likeness. Every item is an essential feature. Every son and daughter of God is a person of love in the divine sense of the term. They love as God loves. They love with a benevolent love. They do good patiently to all, even to the unthankful and the evil: and this love is a fruit of the Spirit; that is, it is a sentiment generated in the mind by the teaching of the Spirit. It is not the offspring of natural impulse. The natural man is governed by his likes. As Jesus expresses it,

*"Sinners love those that love them."*

Saints are not governed by their likes, though they have their likes. Their constitutional peculiarity in all ages is to do the will of their Father who is in heaven, and who commands them, by the mouth of Christ, to love and bless with the love and patience which He shows to all the world. Joy is the result, —not joy of an ordinary sort, but joy in God, the satisfaction of resting in Him in the performance of His commandments, with the assurance of the exceeding joy awaiting all who will be presented with gladness before the presence of His glory, in the day of Christ. Peace comes of this, and as a consequence, long-suffering towards others, and gentleness, and goodness: for what can compare with a living faith in God for power to engender a meek and quiet spirit, and temperance in all things?

A body of men, accepted through Christ and trained for a lifetime in these self-restraints and these benignities towards others, are the fit and glorious governors-elect of the ages to come. The world will be blessed under their guidance and leadership. Their love will mollify and predispose the nations to obedience; their joy will inspire all men with a noble ideal: their peace will diffuse calmness and bestow rest on the weary world. Their gentleness and long-suffering and goodness will tame the turbulent and bring the indisposed into submission, while the rod of iron inside the velvet will guarantee the stability of their righteous rule, and give security to all men against the insurrection of lawlessness or the movements of overthrown ambitions. What language can express the glory of having a place in such an order of men? If the glory is great, the terms of admission among them are stringent if simple. They are briefly comprehended in one of the concluding statements of the chapters read—a statement deserving, nay demanding attentive consideration day and night.

*"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."*

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