

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 248

The great thing we have to fight against is the undue impression made upon our sense by what we actually see and hear. One great object of our meeting together this morning is to ease off and correct this undue impression, and to give a right place to things that we do not see or hear, but which have a greater basis of reality than those which we do see and hear. What are the bread and wine of which we eat and drink on this occasion but mementoes of things that have not been seen or heard by us?

"In remembrance of Me."

*"Ye show forth **the Lord's death** until he come":*

Such is the inspired and unerring definition of the act required of us when we meet thus for the breaking of bread. We have not seen Christ: we were not witnesses of his death: we are here to recall both to memory, along with the many other things that centre in these. We are here to come under the power of truth. Truth is a many-sided thing. It consists of things past present and to come. The man who lives in the present alone lives a very circumscribed life, and a life that is not an entirely true life, and a life that is not a very interesting life, either for himself or those who may know him. A life of enlightenment is a life that is based upon things that have happened, and things that are certain to happen, as much as upon those that exist for the moment. Even in natural life, this is true. The difference between mental culture and clownishness lies as much in this as in anything, that culture blends with the present the knowledge of the past, and the reasonable assumptions of the future. To culture the past is not unreal though unseen, to ignorance it has no existence and no lesson. How true is this concerning the highest culture—the knowledge of God and the confidence of the future and the docility of the present that arise out of it. To a mind in this state, the sphere of mental action is wide, high and noble. Its limits are akin to the bearings ascribed to the Divine action, "*who wast and art and art to come.*" Past and future are both of them reflected and focussed in the present.

Whatever helps us to feel the reality of the past is good. We are greatly helped in this respect in the reading this morning from Daniel. Here is a writing written over 2,400 years ago, foreshowing things that have since become facts and have also since passed out of the realm of fact and become matters of report and memory. Take this vision of the four empires under the figure of four beasts. The thing was revealed to Daniel in the days of Babylon. Babylon was the centre of imperial dominion at the time—a great city in political importance—(queen of the world in fact)—a great city in architectural solidity and topographical extent. Babylon was the great fact of the hour at that time—the thing to be "seen" as an actual and apparently durable reality. The vision involved the prediction that in the course of time she would cease to exist: in the plain words of Isaiah, that she should—

"Be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from one generation to generation."

Or as in Jeremiah,

"O Lord thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever."

This seemed an extreme improbability at the time; but since that time, the extreme improbability has become the notorious actuality of current fact Babylon is now an uninhabited desolation. Her very whereabouts were unknown till the spade uncovered her ruins in extensive mounds on the silent banks of the Euphrates. Babylon was a solid reality in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah: in our day it requires an effort of enlightened imagination, acting by evidence, to realise that she ever existed. There is no contradicting it, for portions of the ancient city are now in London, including bricks stamped with the name of

Nebuchadnezzar in Chaldaic characters. Still, it is an effort of the mind to believe in a great Babylon that has passed away.

By the vision shown to Daniel, Persia was to succeed Babylon, and Greece was to succeed Persia, and Rome was to succeed Greece. All these things have happened since then. Matters of prophecy at that time, they have come and gone, and are now matters of mere knowledge to those who love wisdom—knowledge that cannot be denied, yet knowledge that has no weight with the common run of people. To the common run of people, their day, their town, their friends constitute the overpowering reality. They go away from a meeting, perhaps, at which the purpose of God, as revealed in the prophets, has been exhibited; and as they step along the street and see the shop signs, and nod to their acquaintances, they have an unconfessed feeling to the effect that what they have been hearing is all moonshine, and that the important facts after all are the houses and the people and the businesses and the fresh air and the eating and the drinking. They go by what they see and hear with their own actual eyes and ears. Their knowledge is only partial, and sometimes half knowledge is a lie. If they would use their eyes and ears more thoroughly than they do, they would come to realise that past things were realities in their day, and that present things are but a moving shadow that will soon be gone. Take this affair of the fourth empire—for example—ROME.

For all that people see in their daily lives, there never was such a power. We read in the vision that it was to *“devour the whole earth and tread it down and break it in pieces.”* From history, we learn that this actually occurred: that the arms of Rome crushed all countries at last, and established a dominion everywhere, comparable only to iron. But there is nothing in the streets and houses and people to tell us that Rome did this. There is nothing in the streets and houses and people to tell us that Rome was once master in Britain. But sometimes it happens that the fact steps forth like a ghost, as it were, from the past, to confront the living of the present with the verities of the past—sometimes from under the very ground we walk on. I was in Bath a short time ago, where a Roman bath has been discovered in the very heart of the town—not what we understand by a bath—not a long coffin-like structure to suit the convenience of one person, but a building—an extensive building, with open swimming baths, and tessellated side pavements and chambers, and other appurtenances, covering nearly an acre of land. The building has been hidden out of sight for centuries, under the accumulation of dust and rubbish. It dates away back to the time when the Romans garrisoned the country. For many generations it has been underground—forgotten. After several years careful excavation, it now stands forth in the light of day, to tell us moderns of an empire which, in the days of Daniel, had no existence, and since Daniel’s days has passed away. Here we are, in actual contact with a state of things that was real in its day, and has passed out of memory.

Well, what of that? Enquire some. The answer is very important. If there was nothing but old Roman prowess and Roman civilisation to look back upon, it would matter very little; but in beholding the actual visible relics of the Roman presence in this country, we are looking upon the traces and proofs of an event that was foreshown by the prophets—the subjugation of the earth by Rome—an event long future to their day, and now long past to ours, and as completely foreign to current sensation as if it had never occurred. The force and significance of this lie here, that that foreshowing is only part of a vision that covered the whole time from Babylon down to the finish of things in the fifth great empire when—

“The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.”

The vision having thus far been verified in all particulars, does not common sense tell us that it will be verified to the last item in the time of the end?

It is not merely that Persia succeeded Babylon, and that Greece overthrew Persia, and that Rome supplanted Greece in all the earth, but that Rome has gone through the

transformations in detail foreshown in the vision, down to our own very generation. Consider: the iron of the image was mixed with clay, and divided up into ten brittle toes. The head of the fourth (or Roman beast) showed ten horns shooting up after the beast itself appeared on the scene. After the ten, came an eleventh, differing from the others, in having eyes and mouth, and a “*stout*” look, and a vaulting claim to authority over all, and a powerful persecuting hand directed against the saints for a specified period of time. The interpretation guides us in the historic application. The fourth beast empire was to be parcelled out into kingdoms, and after their appearance, an eleventh sovereignty was to arise claiming authority over the rest, and imbruing its hands in the blood of all opponents, over whom it should have power for three times and a half—1260 days or years. We look back and see how completely events have run in the channel thus traced out beforehand. Rome Imperial, after a run of about 600 years, collapses before the inroads of the clay-races of the north, which after a military friction of a hundred years, divide up her dominions among themselves, mixing in the clay without abolishing the iron, —casting the northern clay in Roman moulds, and giving us the various national sovereignties of modern Europe. Then behold the uprise of the Papal sovereignty, truly “*diverse from the other ten,*” having “*a look more stout than his fellow-horns,*” claiming jurisdiction over them all, and authority to “*change times and laws.*” Behold the saints “*given into his hand*” everywhere. Behold the appalling spectacle shown to John in Patmos, under another figure, of a persecuting church supported by the organization of military states—a woman drunk with the blood of the saints, riding on the back of a monster. Behold the saints—the sincere friends of God in all countries—enlightened and obedient in the word of His testimony as contained in the writings of Moses, and the prophets, and the apostles—behold them under the heel of this formidable despotism for a long period of centuries. Consider the change that has taken place. We are accustomed to liberty. It was not always so. We write and speak freely of the truth. In former times, we could not have dared on such a liberty on British soil. This morning, brother Richards showed me an old book, written over 200 years ago, in which the Bible doctrine of mortality and immortality is expounded with as much clearness and force as in any Christadelphian publication. It was a book written by an Englishman; but to print that book, the author had to go to Amsterdam. We require to be reminded of these facts so that we may be qualified to rightly interpret the events and signs of our own time.

Now, it is not only in England that the Pope can no longer forbid the publication of the truth (not to speak of imprisoning and killing its friends). It is all the world over. It is in Rome itself. On the very banks of the Tiber, under the very walls of the Vatican, the Pope has to tolerate the circulation of the Bible and the preaching of doctrines subversive of Romanism. As for making war upon the saints, he can no more do such a thing than cite Queen Victoria to his bar of judgment. Consider what this means. Consider when this power departed. It departed exactly at the end of the time allotted in the prophecy for its existence. It departed 1260 years after its commencement, whether that commencement be reckoned from its incipient start under Justinian, in A.D. 533, or its final establishment under Phocas, in A.D. 606-8. In 1260 years from the first date, it was shaken and shorn in the earthquake and tempest that commenced with the French Revolution in 1793 and shook the European system to its foundations. In 1260 years from the second date, its last remnant departed with the occupation of Rome by the Italian troops, the annexation of the States of the Church by Victor Emmanuel and the suppression of the temporal power of the Pope.

The finishing event of the vision is the manifestation of the Ancient of days, to destroy the fourth-beast system utterly, “*because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake.*” We know from other testimony that this is the second appearing of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory, “*to consume the Man of Sin with the breath of his mouth and destroy him with the brightness of his coming.*” We had hoped to have seen this glorious

event at the end of the 1260. In the ardour of desire and expectation, we omitted to give due notice to the fact that there was a period of 1290 to run from the setting up of the papal abomination, which is 30 years more than the 1260. It was natural to suppose that the end of the persecuting power of the Papal Horn would be the beginning of the power of the Blessed Shepherd whom that hateful imposture claims to represent, and that therefore the arrival of the Lord would synchronise with that ending. Allowance was not made for the marginal interval which we can now plainly see was to elapse between the one event and the other. The actual events have opened our eyes. We have never given up hoping for the Lord at any time since 1866-8: but it is satisfactory to be able to see that the prophetic word, rightly applied in its details, did not admit of the fulfilment of the vision. All the other events that are in progress in the earth generally are in harmony with the sublime anticipation generated by the disappearance of the war-making power of the Pope at the appointed time. The great war-cloud that overhangs the world, the unparalleled armaments of Europe, the dwindling power of the Turk, the increasing power of England in Egypt and the east, the ascendancy of the Magogian hosts in the European system, the embroiling influence of the Franco-frogs of the Apocalyptic imagery, all unite to tell us that the world is slowly drifting up to the momentous crisis that will bring the Lord upon the scene. How great will be the shock produced by the tidings of his arrival. How blessed the issue at last for the afflicted nations, for at last the moment will have come when—

“The God of Heaven shall set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed. It shall not be left to other people. It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

“Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou shalt judge the people rightly, and govern the nations upon the earth.”

“Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Taken from: - “The Christadelphian” of 1893

Sunday Morning No. 248

Pages 457-460

By Bro. Robert Roberts