

“WATCHING & WAITING” **—NOT FOR EVER**

“Not for ever,” said a Jew in foreign accent, in a recent conversation in a railway train on some preaching appointment at the synagogue. It was his way of expressing the difference between a permanent and a temporary arrangement. We may use it with comfort in the matter of our weekly assemblies for the breaking of bread. We come here, week after week—week after week; and it seems as if there would be no end to it. We can say with the fullest assurance, “Not for ever.” We shall not always be called upon to celebrate Christ as a memory. We shall do so for the last time one of these days. We shall do so without knowing it is the last time; within the succeeding six days, the arrival of Christ on earth, or something in our own experience, will end “the watch we’ve long been keeping, waiting for the promised day.”

There have been many generations of watchers since the Lord said,

“Hold fast till I come.”

If there has been long waiting, it is because the thing waited for is so stupendous. What so great as everlasting life, and a permanent place among men, when the earth shall have been glorified and filled with the glory of the Lord! The goal will be reached at last, and we shall be more than satisfied if permitted to receive the prize.

The signs that we are nearing the goal increase as the time goes on. Look at the threatening democratic sea, made rough by the storm-winds of socialist doctrine. Hark, the roar of the breaking waves as they dash themselves against the shores of capital and vested interests. Behold the threatening ranks of countless hosts of armed men prepared for battle; and what sanguinary thing is this that we see in the background of the situation, but slowly moving to the front? Israel in terrible affliction in Russia, where the bulk of Israel is to be found in this latter day. Israel has been, more or less, in affliction for 1800 years past; but nothing has affected so vast a body of them as these Russian edicts which aim at the extermination of the Jewish race. That there is a special significance in the spectacle, we may gather from Israel’s experience in Egypt before their deliverance by Moses. Stephen says (Acts 7:17), that “*when the time of promise drew nigh,*” the Pharaoh of that day “*evilily treated our fathers.*” The testimony of Moses is that “*the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour and made their lives bitter with hard bondage,*” and finding that it did not have much effect in checking their growth, they finally resolved to order the destruction of every man child. Such affliction would not have seemed to human methods like a symptom of the time of the promise having drawn near. Yet such was the fact. The sufferings of Israel were a sign that the time was at hand for their deliverance, and this too though Israel’s state was not such as to entitle them to deliverance, but far otherwise. What their state was we learn from Ezekiel 20. It was such as to lead God to say (v. 8) that before they left the land of Egypt, he felt moved to accomplish his anger against them, and only refrained on account of His object in delivering them.

In our age of the world, we have reached another time when the time of the promise has drawn near. Israel in all lands, but especially in Russia, is in as dark and bad a state as their forefathers in Egypt. We might think this an obstacle to the fulfilment of His promise if we did not have the Egyptian example. In reference to the Egyptian affliction, God said to Moses,

“I have seen the affliction of My people: I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them.”

So in reference to the current affliction, we may realise God’s attentive sympathetic notice, and anticipate His interposition on their behalf. We know that in this case, the interposition

will first take a natural form, because there is a partial settlement of things in the land before the Lord's hand is visibly shown. It is therefore reasonable to anticipate some natural arrangement for Israel's relief before the Lord appears. In this connection, the movement in America cannot but seem a step in the right direction, and may indeed lead to large and mature measures. There is a request influentially pressed upon the President of the United States, that he should ask the governments of Europe to consider among themselves the best way of solving the Jewish Question, and recommend the settlement of the Jews in Palestine as the best way. Dr. Thomas, somewhere in Eureka, expresses the opinion that the pre-adventural settlement of Israel in the Holy Land would be the result of an international arrangement among the Powers. It looks very like as if this might actually be realised.

Meanwhile, the Russian measures against the Jews are being carried out with merciless thoroughness. The continental telegrams contain recitals of heart-rending expulsions of whole crowds of Jews in a state of destitution. In evident anticipation of such a time, the words of prophecy in Jeremiah, says (30:5):

"We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear and not of peace. Ask ye now and see whether a man doth travail with child. Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins? And all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it . . . I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity: and Jacob shall return and shall be in rest and be quiet and none shall make him afraid."

In the process of return, in its initial stages, it is evident that the governments are used.

"Thus saith the Lord, behold I will lift up My hand to the Gentiles and set up My standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet" (Isa. 49:22).

A beginning to this work may be the result of this American proposal to the Governments to settle the Russian Jews in Palestine as the best solution of the Russian Jewish problem. Russia is evidently anxious to let them go. She may favour a scheme for their wholesale departure and resettlement in their own land. If so the part she performs afterwards will complete the analogy between her and Egypt. Having let them go, Pharaoh pursued them and met his destruction in the Red Sea. Having let them go, Russia pursues them and comes to her end on the mountains of Israel on the great day of the Lord's manifested presence.

It is highly encouraging to see all these things steadily developing before our eyes. As some have remarked, we live almost in the age of sight instead of faith. Some of us can look back forty years and see what strides have been made. There was nothing in the shape of Jewish colonies in those days. We talked of them, under the instruction of Dr. Thomas, as things likely to be. Now, they are realities. We do not depend even on such a large arrangement as the Americans propose. The work has begun quite independently of that. The Jews are steadily, though slowly returning to the holy Land; colonies are springing up one after the other; Jerusalem is rising; the Jewish population and influence increasing in the Holy City. Just as the tide, when once it begins to flow, advances first in little pools of water and then streams over the stones, and finally covers the shore with all-prevailing waves, so the Jewish movement which began years ago in the return of one here and another there is advancing from strength to strength, and in due course will be a thing that all the world will see and (perhaps) talk about. It is bound to be so; the Word of the Lord cannot fail. This is shown in everything that has been subject of prophecy, those only know who are daily and

affectionate readers of the Scriptures. Prophecy is not confined to the political visions of Daniel and John. It is inwoven with the whole texture of Bible history. It is like the gold thread running through the fabric of the veil of the Holy of Holies in all its parts. At all stages of the work that God has wrought in the line of Abraham, and in many matters, great and small, personal and political, the unveiling of the future has taken place. And in reference to all these, it holds good that the Word of the Lord has not failed. There is no case in which the things that God said would come to pass have not come to pass. The words of Joshua are applicable to the whole range of divine foreshadowings:

“There hath not failed one word of ought that the Lord hath spoken.”

Israel’s dispersion and Palestine’s desolation may be taken as a leading example—one so palpable as to defy being overlooked. A man must be in the deepest depths of ignorance and darkness who does not know of the scattered Jews and their down-trodden land. And it does not require a very wide range or acquaintance with human life to know how impossible it is to forecast the fortunes of a land and people: and how peculiarly improbable it was that a land situated so advantageously and constituted so favourably as the Holy Land should experience the *“desolations of many generations.”*

This is a matter known and read of all men. There are many many others, not so generally known and read, but all exhibiting the same illustration of perfect fulfilment of what God has made known by the prophets. But they are all of a class requiring a loving and docile attention for their full and convincing discernment. They are not of the kind that sceptical criticism would demand. They are not a string of dates and particulars in advance. They are not an almanac of disconnected items. God could have given us a complete calendar of futurity to the minutest detail; but such would not have been consistent with the objects of His dealings with a race of sinners. Those objects require that He should advance as far as is necessary for Him to be found by modesty and reverence and faith—and no farther. This He has done in many condescending and kindly ways, though with majesty and firmness. Among those ways has been the disclosure of futurity in a variety of matters that leave no room for doubt when attention is adequately applied.

The position of the Jews is not a more signal illustration than the fortunes of the Gentiles. These, as you know, were outlined long in advance in the sure Word of prophecy: and all those outlines have been filled in, except such as belong to the era of Christ’s reappearance, now hard upon the world. We have seen (historically speaking) the rise and fall of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. We have seen the desolation of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Egypt, and other neighbours of Israel whose overthrow was foreshown. We have seen the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in harmony with other features of the prophetic writings. We have seen the establishment of a false church in the imperial European arena, in fulfilment of that apocalyptic *“Testimony of Jesus which is the spirit of prophecy.”* We have seen the fortunes of the Truth during the long interval of Christ’s absence run in the very channel marked out for them in the Revelation from God sent by Jesus Christ, *“that his servants might know the things that should shortly come to pass;”* and all this in addition to scores of foretold personal particulars scattered through Bible history from the beginning.

All these things form a background against which the prophecy-fulfilling events of our own generation stand out with but one significance to the mind of enlightened reason, and that is, that the Word of God is true, and that the purpose of God, unseen and undiscerned of man in the midst of his distractions, is on the march with the centuries, and will shortly reach its appointed culmination in the revived interposition of God’s powerful hand in Israel’s affairs, according to the word spoken:

“According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might . . . And they shall fear because of the Lord our God.”

With this prospect, our meeting this morning is in harmony. We “*do this*”—we break this bread and drink this wine—“*until he come,*” who is to accomplish all these things. In thus doing we “*wait for the Lord,*” as he has required; and he has said:

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

He did not mean that they would not have shame for the time being. On the contrary, such are put to shame now: the confessing of Christ before men means the incurring of shame now. There is no more infallible method of getting into low esteem with men, for faith in Christ, in the Bible sense, has long since become inconsistent with a true enlightenment in the estimation of the world of our era. The “*shall not be ashamed*” has a future bearing; and its bearing then will be striking and thorough; for the world, everywhere, will shrink with craven fear in the presence of God’s manifested power in the earth. When Christ reappears, “*all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.*” But those who love his appearing and are waiting for him will not be affected thus. They will be sent for and acknowledged by Christ as his faithful servants, and gladdened by that investiture with his nature and placed by his side in safety, and glory and joy for evermore. Such are the promises of the Word of God that cannot fail. May it be ours to experience the full measure of their fulfilment in the great and terrible day of the Lord which is about to dawn.

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