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"THE PEACE OF GOD'S CHILDREN."

A SERMON

PREACHED

IN HAGLEY CHURCH,

BY THE RECTOR,

ON OCCASION OF TWO DEATHS.

[SAMPSON LLOYD, late of Wassell Grove, Hagley, and of Areley House, Stourport, and PETER BULLOCK, Station Master at Hagley, both "departed this life with the seal of faith," on September 26th, 1874.]

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JOB xxii. 21—“*Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.*”

These words are very applicable, as I hope to shew, to thoughts that must be occupying many of our hearts just now, with reference to some souls lately taken from us.

But first let us look into their original meaning as they occur in the book of Job.

They are not the words of Job himself, but of Eliphaz the Temanite: one of those friends of his, of whom the voice of God, at the end of the book, says that they did not speak truth about God.

These friends always maintained against Job that all suffering and misfortune in the world comes upon men only on account of their own wickedness. And hence they said that if Job had been as righteous as other men, he would not have suffered more than they.

Now this was directly contrary to the truth. For Job is plainly declared by the voice of God Himself, at the beginning of the book, to have been a very righteous and holy man in God's sight. And the reasons for which the Almighty was pleased to allow all these terrible calamities to come upon him are distinctly declared to be, no special wickedness of his own, but others of a different nature. One of His objects is declared to be to shew to other men, and to the slanderous Evil Spirit himself, the strength of Job's righteousness and faith in God. Thus it was to be

proved, by actual trial, that Job's faith would stand firm, not only, as Satan said, in easy times, but even under the most terrible difficulties; not only when God *seemed* to be just, but even when he *seemed* unjust; not only when Job was not looking at the difficulties and mysteries of Providence, but even when they were pressing upon him in all their terrors and utmost greatness.

It is true that under these very awful circumstances Job did at first complain with great bitterness of God's dealings with him. He did not, you must ever bear in mind, know clearly, as we do, that there is a future life. And yet, without knowing it, he had to look straight at all the mighty terrors of the world's state,—at the prosperity and success of the wicked—at the many sufferings and miseries of the righteous. And he saw too that the arrows of God's irresistible and most fearful judgements were being discharged from all sides against himself, though he was not conscious of deserving it, and though he knew that he was, and had been through life, more righteous than many about him whom he saw unvisited by any such calamities. Thus, to an honest and clear-sighted man like him, everything seemed very terrible, and full of great and awful mystery. No wonder then that he complained and poured out his griefs even in passionate words of remonstrance with God,—some of them undoubtedly far stronger than was right.

And yet we may observe that in all these somewhat questionable words at the beginning of the book, which were uttered by Job under the first pressure of the awful mysteries that surrounded him, he never really charged God with injustice. He only says out to God Himself,

with great strength, in his prayers and reasonings, that things *looked* as if He was unjust,—though it was impossible that He should be so really.

At the end of the book, however, when God Himself has spoken directly to him out of the whirlwind, and made him see all the mighty wonders of His wisdom, and the immeasurable greatness of His works in Nature, and revealed to him how, because God is so infinitely greater than man, and His schemes so far too vast for his comprehension, man is utterly unfit to sit in judgement upon Him, or upon His ways, Job altogether submits. He says then, from the depths of his heart, that he is now perfectly convinced that all that God does *must* be right, however, at particular times, things may seem, to man's dark sight and imperfect comprehension, inconsistent with that belief.

Thus was God's purpose in manifesting Job's faith and piety against Satan's base and malicious slander, and characteristic detraction (—the word "Devil" properly means "Slanderer;" it is his characteristic work to impute base motives even to noble actions, and to disbelieve in the goodness of good men) fulfilled; and Job was proved by the severest tests to have such a faith in God, that not even such overwhelming visitations as these could overcome it. And the insincere, uncandid, and as we must call them *canting* and dishonest sayings of his friends—their "pious lies," by which they thought to defend God's justice—are condemned, and convicted of falsehood.

Now, I am not sure that, in the words of my text, Eliphaz is not guilty of one of these unreal sayings. "*Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace,*" he says,

“*thereby good shall come to thee.*”—the words have a noble sound, and will bear a right and most true sense, as I hope to shew. But if you study the whole chapter in which they occur, and other words of Eliphaz, you will probably be led to the opinion held by some* of those who have most carefully studied this book, that it was not in this high and true sense that he intended them. What Eliphaz probably meant was, that if Job followed such a course, prosperity of a temporal sort on Earth would certainly come to him. And if he meant that, it was a delusion and a falsehood. He could only believe it by falling into a common sin of religious men,—shutting his eyes to innumerable plain facts; since it is by no means always the case, as popular stories are so apt to say it is, that right conduct brings prosperity on Earth. The knowledge of God, and faithful obedience to Him, will *not* always bring “peace,” or what the world calls “good.” On the contrary it is often the case, that “*whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*” †; the truest Saints have sometimes been the greatest sufferers, after the likeness of the great King of Saints and of Martyrs,—that is of those who have suffered and even died for their goodness—Christ Himself. For His crown on earth was a crown of thorns; He suffered, unjustly, from the wickedness of men; and His reward, on earth, was the agony, the Cross, and grave.

But yet as I have said, in another and higher sense, it is true, that the knowledge of God, and faithful obedience to Him does bring peace, and that as my text says, “*thereby good comes to man.*” .

* See notes in the Speaker's Commentary.

† Heb. xii. 6.

For a real knowledge of God and of His mind towards us makes a man sure —yes, in the end, absolutely and calmly sure,—that all that He does is, and must be right, let the world say what it will; and that though for us with our limited sight on Earth, “*clouds and darkness are round about Him,*” yet “*righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His seat.*”* Hence such men, having reached to this true and blessed “knowledge of God,” arrive at being able to say, with Job, “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,*”† or like David, “*Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me,*”§ and with Habakkuk, “*Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*”‡

Yes, there is a peace given to the true children of God, that passeth the natural understanding; one which can stand firm and serene, even under the world’s most terrible troubles—even in the face of agony, torture and death:—which can cry unto God, “Father,” even from a cross of agony and shame; and which will, as God is true, obtain its rewards, outward as well as inward, in the world of perfect retribution. But this peace, this hope of the righteous, is founded in, and sustained by faith—not sight. It does not shrink from, but faces and conquers, the world’s greatest darkness. It is the lamp of God burning bright even in Earth’s darkest night, and in its gloomiest dungeons. It was this faith that enabled

* Psalm xcvi. 2. † Job xiii 15. § Psalm xxiii. 4. ‡ Hab. iii. 17.

Isaiah and Habakkuk even when the whole Earth about them was full of wickedness, unbelief, and sin, to lift up a mighty voice of absolute certainty saying, "*the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*".* which made Paul and Silas sing hymns of joy at midnight in the prison at Philippi; which enabled St. Paul, while daily expecting, locked in the depths of a Roman prison, the order for his cruel and unjust execution, to write that wonderful Epistle of heroic Christian joy and triumph, the second to Timothy; the faith to which Christ our Lord Himself appealed, as He stood, surrounded by weeping mourners, before the cave in which His friend Lazarus lay buried, in the words of power "Said I not unto thee, *that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" †

Yes, "*this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,—“ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*" ‡

And you see it sometimes now.

The minds of many, who hear me will, I doubt not, have been turning, as I have been speaking, to some instances which have been seen here amongst us of late, of such Faith, and Hope, and Peace in God.

One death has taken place within the last ten days, which may seem to our short sight untimely, and present difficulties to faith in the wisdom and goodness that governs all. Men are ever ready to speak of such events as "mysteries"; and, no doubt, like thousands of other things, they are, more or less, mysterious. But, it is hardly possible to listen to the tone in which this is often said, without gathering a painful impression that those

* Isaiah xi. 9. ; Hab. ii 14. † St. John xi. 40. ‡ I John v. 4 ; Heb. xi. 1.

who say it do not use that expression quite sincerely,—that in their heart of hearts, they allow themselves in the feeling that such cases are not “mysteries” at all; but are manifest acts of injustice in the Divine Providence that governs the world.

But there are, thanks be to God, others amongst us, and not, I trust, a few only, whose faith is of a robuster and deeper nature; who do, with all their hearts, *believe*, even when they cannot, in the least, *see*.

It is of two remarkable and blessed cases of such true faith in God which have been seen amongst us here that I think it my duty and privilege now to speak.

It is not often, my brethren, that I think it well to speak from this sacred place of particular persons. This should, in my judgement, be done only when it happens, either that the cases are generally known to us all and that the thought of them is occupying the minds of most of us; or are of so special a nature that we may believe that God is teaching us lessons through them, in a way that He does not by ordinary events.

But the cases I am now about to speak of, have these characteristics, and they illustrate in a remarkable manner, the lessons I have been drawing from my text.

One of the two is, I doubt not, in the minds of us all this day. The other is that of a great sufferer whom we have, for some months past, been praying for, by name; and who has now at last been released from his terrible pains, and called to his rest. Both were cases of men who had in the deepest and truest sense of the words “acquainted themselves with God,” and gained thereby a peace which nothing could shake.

I will say a few words upon each of these.

The first I have mentioned was as well known to us all as any one, unless it is we ourselves, your ministers. His well known figure was as regularly seen, attending this House of God, and coming also to the Lord's Table, during the years he lived here, as that of any one. Never, scarcely, while at home was he absent, though he lived at some distance, and though the great and ceaseless activity of his week-day life would have been pleaded by many, as an excuse for staying away, and for taking more absolute rest, on God's Day of Rest. But our dear friend was one of those to whom Religion, in the truest and deepest sense of that word, was, not only the great concern, but also the great comfort, and delight of life. It was no bare or cold sense of mere *duty* that brought him here; it was the deepest feelings and the strongest impulses of his truly Christian heart. So it was that he never, we might almost say, unless actually prevented by illness, or by some unavoidable cause, missed an opportunity of joining with those who could say "*I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord.*"* And from, I cannot doubt, precisely the same motives, of pure and simple and warm love of God, leading to a rare singleness of purpose in doing any and every good work that God put in his way, he made himself, notwithstanding the unusual pressure upon him of very much secular work with which he was always occupied, the willing official servant of the Church. He was one of those who felt the Church to be really the Church of *God*, not of man; he was not the man to look at these things as worldly men do,—

* Psalm cxxii. 1.

they were deep heart-matters to him. And hence it was from these motives—(had it indeed been otherwise,—had he done such works only from lower motives, we could not have attributed this worth to them)—that he fulfilled these and other duties, in a manner that won for him, and that could not but win for him, the warm affection, regard and respect of us all. So it came to pass that he was known, more or less, to our whole population; and I may add with perfect truth that the more intimately he was known, the more he was loved, as well as respected; and the more clearly did men see that the real, ever working main-spring of his whole life was religion, of the deepest and most Christian kind,—the true love of God, and of man, in God and for God, and the deep feeling of his inmost heart that Christ had saved him, and died for him. In the last letter that I had the happiness to receive from him—only a month ago,—there occur words which I think I may lawfully mention to you, and which expressed the habitual state of his mind towards God. “I have had,” he says, “a sad illness, and why it has occurred I know not. One thing is very certain:—I was very near exchanging Time for Eternity. Well! I trust I am prepared. I have one faith, one hope,—life in Time, life in Eternity, in Christ Jesus.” Such words were not, in his mouth, as they are in some, *mere* words; they expressed, as all who knew him well feel absolutely certain, the deepest and strongest feeling in him.*

And it was because it was so,—because the ruling power and true mainspring of his life was the love of Christ as his Saviour and his heart’s true Lord, that he

* See note at the end.

was, in all his life, the truly just, and kind, and consistent man we all saw him to be. A man whom all could trust; whom all could feel to be their friend and brother; the loss of whom is great indeed in every place to which he belonged.

Under these circumstances, then, I may, I trust, rightly, endeavour very briefly here to point out what appear to me to have been some of the principal characteristics of that goodness with which God had adorned him, and which distinguished him among men.

First I would put *simplicity*. There are some good men who, being good, seem always conscious that they are so. Perhaps indeed they are themselves aware of this fault, and, striving against it in the fear of God, partly keep it under. But still, as a fact, there it is. Though they try, they do not fully succeed in the effort, to become altogether free from this unhappy self-consciousness, this tendency to self-righteousness. In doing good there seems ever in their mind something of a backward glance at their own goodness and merit in doing it. They do indeed sincerely *wish* to make of their acts *pure* and unmixed acts of love, not in any degree of selfishness, or vanity, but they do not completely succeed,—they cannot suppress some little of self-praise and self-worship, some slight taint of personal pride, of inward claim upon the praise of spectators, or of that slight unwillingness which comes from a want of entire *whole-heartedness* in wishing to do the good, and that only. But without saying that there was *no* taint of any such feeling in the acts of our dear friend, which can hardly be said of any man, we should all, I think, say that there was as little of any such self-regard in him, as in any

one we have known. His acts,—his unceasing acts,—of Christian benevolence and good will, were done, and were ever felt to be done, out of kindness and nothing else. According to the Divine words, in doing such acts “*his left hand knew not what his right hand did,*”^{*}—they were done *simply*; he thought of one thing only as he did them,—the satisfaction of his own warm love of God and of man by effecting some real good, in the Name, and for the sake of Christ, “*Whose he was, and Whom he served.*”

Next, I think we should all mention as characteristic of him, a singular and beautiful *cheerfulness*, an habitual brightness and serenity of spirit: that peculiar and attractive Christian joyfulness, and ever radiant “*sunshine of the heart,*” whose unfailing source, and ever-flowing spring, is love—the true love of God and of man.

Thus in their best and highest sense, the words of my text were fulfilled in him—“*Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace.*”

And so his departure from among us is a real loss of *light* to all who ever used to see him; a loss too as of a warm fire, to which all who were at any time feeling the coldness, the want of friendliness, the bitternesses, of the common world, might ever confidently turn to revive their charity and their hope. He would always have helped us all to take fair and generous, rather than bitter or unfair views of any human being and his sayings and doings.

In short were I to be asked to say in a few words what was the *direction* in which, consistently with that infirmity which besets human nature, his character

* St. Matthew vi. 3.

grew, I believe I might not unfairly say it was in that of those beautiful Christian graces which St. Paul enumerates as fruits of the Spirit of Christ,—“*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*” * These, together with much of brave manliness and firmness of purpose in doing good, were characteristic of him.

One more grace which marked him I will mention,—*unworldliness*. Under no circumstances of success, or of worldly promotion, would there have been seen in him any of that littleness and vulgarity of soul, which takes the form of pride of place, pride of purse, pride of rank. Such feelings were foreign to the pure simplicity and true *brotherliness* to all mankind which so strongly marked the character of our loved friend and neighbour. The poorest and simplest would be as sure of receiving true Christian courtesy and respect from him, as the richest and greatest; and, equally, he would ever have met the greatest of the world with that perfect simplicity which gives true dignity without the least mixture of pride.

The last words of his last letter to me were characteristic. At the time he wrote it, there seemed good ground of hope that God would see fit to grant him recovery from his great illness; and, speaking of this, he wrote, “I think I shall now soon be better, and I trust able to do some good for a little time in this very comfortable home.” Observe he does not say, “able to *get* some good” but “to *do* some good.” That was very like the man. So in life, as in death, the words were fulfilled, in this true son of God, “*Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace.*”

And now I must say a few words of another bright

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

example of invincible faith in God's goodness, and in the reality of His saving and life-giving presence, under terrible and long continued sufferings and trials, which we have seen amongst us during several months past. You miss now one name which was mentioned week after week through many a month among those for whom our prayers were asked. And never, scarcely, could human being have suffered more than this good man and gentle-hearted Christian was called to do, under circumstances of great and peculiar and continual discomfort. Every week for months he expected, and even, with submission to the Divine Will, prayed for death; but it came not. But through all he maintained such steady and sure faith in the goodness and faithfulness of God to him, as made him—wonderful, and even miraculous as it seemed to those who saw him,—even *rejoice* in God, and in the absolutely sure hope of Heaven, as the free gift of God to him in Christ. One part of Scripture which he specially asked me to read to him, was that Psalm which most strongly expresses praise and thanksgiving, the 103rd, beginning with the words "*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thy sin and healeth all thine infirmities.*" As it was read to him, his face, as he lay upon that bed of weary and distressing pain, glowed with a real and enthusiastic joy, as if he was actually seeing the glory of God, and feeling,—as no doubt he was,—the beginning of Heaven within him. Never did I hear a word of murmur escape his lips. He submitted, absolutely and totally, to the Divine Will. He forbade our praying that he might recover; knowing, he said, that that was impossible, or manifestly not God's will; but only that his soul might be released, as soon as might be, and

meantime, be kept peaceful in faith. Often did he say that without religion, he could not have borne his existence, but that with it all was well; that he did not look forward beyond each day as it passed, but rested peacefully in God's present power, leaving the future to Him. Here, then, in a deeper sense than Eliphaz probably meant, was a case of one who had indeed "acquainted himself with God," and reached peace,—not by becoming free from suffering, but by bearing it with Christ, and in Christ, by the might of His Spirit. Surely therefore may we trust to see that heroic Christian soul among those who shall stand, with the palm branches of victory in their hands, around the Central Throne, of whom it will be said *"These are they that came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the Throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the Throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."* *

Finally, my brethren, if these true servants and children of God, are taken from us, it is for us to remember that we have so much the more to do to keep up in the world, if so it may be, that spirit which it was given to them to shew forth; and to carry on their work for God and for man. If there is one less amongst us to witness for God and for all kindness to men, so much the more should we pray for grace to act in the same spirit,

and to take up the torch which has fallen from his dying hand. And if ever you are called to suffer in long weary nights of sickness, or under any of the more terrible and crushing pains of this world of trial, try to bear in mind the beautiful example we have seen, as a true light from Heaven in the darkness of life, of patience, of hope, and of that unconquered faith and charity, which the Spirit of Christ, and that only, can create and maintain in us.

So may the world, and each one of us be the better for these blessed examples.

To these surely among other blessed Spirits now gone from us to the perfect world where the light of God's countenance shines upon them continually, we may apply the glorious words of Divine inspiration, "*I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord : even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*" *

* Rev xiv.13.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since writing the above, the following additional facts respecting our dear friend, Sampson Lloyd, have been communicated to me by his faithful, his loved, and deeply valued companion in life. It may be well, it is thought, to make them public, that we may, all of us, the more clearly see what was that hidden spring whence the lovely fruits of his truly Christian goodness derived their beautiful and invincible life.

"There is one remark which, if you permit, might be added, respecting my dearest husband's knowledge and study of his Bible. Daily rising at 6-30 a.m., and even lately, when the night's sleep has been sorely disturbed (more or less) these two years, by *excessive* pain, he still pursued the same course ; and many a time have I found him on his knees with the open Bible before him. The "Book of Common Prayer" with other books of devotion were never removed from his *writing* table ; and their well-worn aspect assures one of the sanctifying use they had even in his

usual daily avocations. It appears to me that the statement of this peculiarly marked feature in the life of so busy and active a man would redound to God's honour.

E. L. Lloyd."

In another letter mention is made of many beautiful proofs, from his words during his last illness, of his habitual entire submission to his Heavenly Father's will. This was shewn strikingly when he had to undergo the heavy trial of learning that, even if his life were spared, he must be an invalid ; and so could not enjoy that which it seems had even from his youth been an object of pleasant hope to him,—life in freedom in that fair and peaceful earthly home, which he at last reached. But he uttered, we are told, no complaints ; but shewed, then too, an entire submission to the Blessed Will of God. And at the end, "she who went with him hand in hand (most literally) to Jordan's brink can testify that this humble hope" (expressed in the letter quoted in the sermon) "was more than realized in the calm un murmuring repose with which he accepted the Lord's Will respecting him."

So may we with great thankfulness and joy follow him up to the very border of the unseen state, and see him then still holding on to, and supported by the hand of gracious Divine Power and Mercy that had so long guided his steps through this earthly scene. Confidently then, though humbly, may we use respecting this "Israelite indeed in whom was no guile," the beautiful words spoken by Bishop Heber of another, which apply also to the other true child of God of whom mention is made in the above sermon :—

"Thou art gone to the grave ; but we will not deplore thee,
 Though sorrows and darkness encompass the tomb ;
 Thy Saviour has passed through its portals before thee,
 And the lamp of His love was thy light through the gloom.

Thou art gone to the grave ; we no longer behold thee,
 Nor tread the rough paths of the world by thy side ;
 But the wide arms of mercy were spread to enfold thee,
 And sinners may hope since the Sinless has died.

Thou art gone to the grave, and its mansion forsaking,
 Perchance thy tried spirit in fear linger'd long ;
 But the Sunshine of Heaven beamed bright on thy waking,
 And the sound which thou heard'st was the Cherubim's song !

Thou art gone to the grave, but we will not deplore thee,
 Whose God was thy Ransom, thy Saviour and Guide ;
 He gave thee, He took thee, and He will restore thee,
 And death has no sting since the Saviour has died."



