

## THE LOGIC OF THE STARS

In the Scripture read this morning, our thoughts are in a special manner directed to the contemplation of the rock on which we stand. Psalm 96, like all other Psalms, fixes our minds on God. One of the statements in it has a peculiar power in this direction. I refer to verse 5:

*“All the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.”*

The force lies in the statement that Yahweh *“made the heavens.”* It is impossible to convey a more powerful idea of the greatness of Yahweh than is expressed in these few words. We realise this best, perhaps, on a starry night, when we walk abroad under the vast expanse overhead. We seem impressed at night as we are not in the day with the greatness of heaven above. In the daytime, the clouds limit the view, or the blue sky gives us the idea of a roof that shuts us in from the rest of the universe. Comfort and tranquillity belong to the daylight. At night, the starry depths are revealed; the silent glory of a thousand twinkling points of light seems to speak of power and immensity more impressively than the sun’s golden flood. As we scan the shining host and think of the magnitude of each single orb, and the vastness of the distances that separate them one from another, though apparently near together; and of the exactness of their order and their movements, though apparently massed in confusion, we are simply overawed and stunned. We feel we have no faculty to grasp the stupendousness of this wonderful creation. We sink tired to the ground. But the effort is not useless. It helps us to have some faint conception of the Creator. It helps us to respond to God’s own appeal when He says:

*“To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by name; by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one faileth” (Isa. 40:25).*

If God made the heavens, it is a natural thing to argue how great must God be. “Ah, true,” say some; “but how do we know He made them?” There is an answer to that; but this is not the time for it. Suffice it to say that all minds of the higher order are impressed with the evidence afforded by the starry host of the existence of a Creator. Napoleon 1, a man of unusual intellectual vigour, though a despiser of priests, was no deaf listener to the logic of the stars. It is reported of him that during the voyage to Egypt, when surrounded on deck by a number of officers, who were discussing Voltaire’s doctrines among themselves, he said, “It is all very well, gentlemen, but who made these?” - pointing to the stars. That the stars have not always existed is a recognised and demonstrable fact. A cause equal to their evolution must, therefore, have preceded them, so that our sighing friends may take rest in the simple fact that God made them. “But how did He make them?” Well, He did not make them as a man makes a chair or table. His ways are higher than man’s in all respects.

*“By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens”* (Job 26:13).

The Spirit affects and controls the very atomic constitutions of all substance. All things are but the concrete of the invisible. I will illustrate what I mean. Take a piece of ice: here you have solid substance that you can see and handle. Place it out in the sun; it melts; now you have water, but wait long enough, the water will evaporate, and nothing will be left. The solid ice has disappeared. Its elements exist, but they are invisible. But you may say, “Well, of course, everybody knows ice disappears in that way; what has that to do with things in general?” It has this much to do with it: that it is a common and easily-comprehended illustration of what can be done with everything. You burn paper or wood, and the flame dissipates their substance into the invisible. You dissolve the hardest metals in the appropriate acid, and compound it chemically into a solution that will evaporate and leave nothing behind but a sediment which can, in its turn, be treated and dispelled in the same way. In all these cases, you resolve substance into invisible energy. You do not destroy it; you transmute it; yet you can restore it, and it cannot of itself come back into the original combination. Now what is true of little things, such as those I have mentioned, is true of heaven and earth throughout, so far as abstract possibility is concerned. They could be resolved into invisible power. They are but the concrete or condensation of invisible energy. Invisible energy preceded them, and out of it they have come.

But the question is, how came they forth? How is it that out of the same simple primal energy that fills the universe have come such endless diversity of substance, form, function, and glory? (For it must be remembered that the various invisible elements into which substances can be chemically resolved—such as oxygen, hydrogen, carbon and the like, are themselves further reducible into a common primal force.) To this question, the science of our day vouchsafes no answer. It first says that it cannot tell, and then that it is no business of science to tell. In a certain sense this is true, and we might leave science out of the question altogether, were it not that, in the hands of some of its professors, it dogmatizes against the answer which the Bible gives. In such a case we have to show that science itself is against the scientists, inasmuch as when thoroughly followed out, it shows us a situation of things that requires the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful initiative to account for things as they are. All scientists, however, have not thus to be combated. The truly philosophic minds who can follow facts to their ultimate issues—such as Professor Tyndall and Professor Pritchard—admit the idea of a Creator as compatible with science. Some go further than allowing it compatible. They say that the minutest atoms that go to make this and that, have all the appearance of manufactured articles; that is, particles designed specifically and differentially for those chemical affinities that result in certain forms of substance. So that, at the lowest depth of investigation, science discovers things “made,” though unable to throw any light on the question—“Who made them?” Thus the child and the philosopher meet. They arrive by a different road, but reach the same destination. The philosopher, after much labour and thought, says, “Creation has been made”; the child in the nursery says the same thing on the strength of simple impression and direct information. The class between think it beneath their education and their dignity to profess so simple a faith. But it is the true faith, at once simple and profound. At no greater truth can we arrive, and on no softer a pillow can we lay the wearied intellect than what is contained in God’s own declaration:

*“All those things hath mine hand made”* (Isa. 66:2), re-echoed by John (chap.1):

*“All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”*

And so we lift our eyes again to the heavens, and learn from their glory the unsearchable and unutterable grandeur of the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. Well may we tremble at His word; well may we have His name in reverence; well may we love and fear Him with all our heart and soul, and strength and mind, as required of us.

But the picture is not complete without His promises. Apart from these, the greatness of God would only seem an aggravation of our lot. The glory of heaven and earth would only mock us, so to speak, if we had no hope, and were without God in the world. What is the glorious sunshine to men cast away in an open boat at sea without food and water? It is an aggravation of their miseries. So might men say, “Of what good to us is this stupendousness of power and wisdom? What interest can we take in the beauty and the glory and the magnitude of the universe? Why ask us to rejoice in the shining host of heaven? We are wretched. The human race is debased. Nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand are in poverty—poverty of pocket, poverty of mind, poverty of nature. Unscrupulous cleverness lords it over the interests of mankind. Iniquity is established. All are dying. Life is a troubled dream. Vanity and vexation of spirit is written over all.” True, true, true, is the lamentation; and if we could know nothing more of God than the greatness manifest in heaven and earth, we might well join with Job and Jeremiah in wishing we had never appeared in such an orphaned state of existence.

But the case stands otherwise, and this is the gospel. Things are bad, but it is for a reason, and a good state of things will come.

*“Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace”* (Psa. 37:10).

*“The whole earth shall be filled with his glory.”*

*“The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”*

Sin hath reigned unto death; but death shall be swallowed up of victory. The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. The Lord God shall wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth. The tabernacle of God shall be with men; He shall be their God, and they shall be His people. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more curse and no more death.

The gospel of Christ exactly supplies our need. It gives us hope and joy in heaven and earth. It enables us to feel even now in the Father's house. True, it is only faith; but faith must come before sight; so it pleases God to appoint. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, and we must please Him before He will admit us to the riches of His glory. But let us realise what faith is. It is not the thing some people talk about. It is not a thing taken for granted without certainty. It is not a mental phantom; it is not a sentiment; it is not a fancy. It is "*the substance of things hoped for,*" and the things are hoped for because they have been promised, and we are sure they have been promised, and we know that He is faithful that hath promised. It is conviction founded on facts. The man of unbelief looks with contempt on the man of faith. The facts would justify the contrary relation of things. The man of unbelief is such because of ignorance, and his ignorance is due to a bias in favour of present things, which prevents him from subjecting himself to the agency of knowledge. He loves the present world, and he chooses to suppose that things will never be different from what they are. He listens to the glowing hopes of the believer with a patronising pity. "My dear fellow," he says, "it is all very beautiful, but it belongs to Utopia. Existence is a stern affair, and has no place for such roseate dreams." What can we say? We can say this, that if we are to take what now is as the measure and interpretation of what is to be, our patronising friend may have some standing ground. But where is the wise man who would seriously propound such a doctrine, even a natural philosopher? He cannot be found; the fools, of course, are plentiful enough. There was a time when there were no men upon earth, our enemies themselves being judges; upon our patronising friend's principle there ought, therefore, never to have been men upon earth. The principle will not stand for a moment.

The limited experience of corruptible man is the unsafest of all rules to work by as to possible futurity. We must not confine our view to what we individually see and feel. We must take in facts we have not seen. In this respect we must go back in order to go forward. If we go back far enough, we find Christ upon earth, doing wonders, speaking as man never spoke. We find Christ crucified; Christ raised from the dead, and Christ ascended into heaven. We find Christ preached by a miracle-working apostleship, and on these facts alone we find a foundation for the hope that the day is coming when the state of things on earth will be in complete harmony with the wisdom and the beauty and the glory, which our own eyes can see now in heaven above and earth beneath; a day when Christ will return according to his promise, and bring all things into subjection to his glorious will.

Let us rise to this wide range of vision. Let us reject the impressions which a too close confinement in the lines and channels of our petty life is apt to make on our minds. Let us not make the mistake of judging the ages by our few and evil days. This is the mistake that is made by men around us. They argue that because they find things in a certain way, things will never be different. It is as if a schoolboy were to conclude he would never be done with school. Or transfer the illustration to some of those animalculae that naturalists tell us come into existence and die with every breath. In a train going through a railway tunnel, many would be born and die during the passage. Suppose they could think; judging by their own experience, they would imagine the world was all darkness and noise. They would have no knowledge of the smiling country and the glorious sunlight at the other end of the tunnel. They would not be aware the tunnel had any end. That is how it is with the poor mortals who set up their experience of the present darkness and confusion as the measure of our hopes.

Because they live and die in darkness, they think we shall always be in the tunnel; they have no knowledge of the appointed exit into the light, and the arrival at the glorious terminus, where the train will stop and the passengers will get out for a settlement in safety and comfort and peace.

The truth emancipates us from the depressing company of such thoughts. It brings to us the joyful news of an age of light and strength and righteousness and joy, which shall dawn when the present night shall have passed away. It exhibits to us a destiny beyond every human aspiration in its height, and transcending our highest conceptions in its glory. It holds before us a prize that beggars all ordinary appeals to human motive and human exertion—a prize that combines, in an ineffable form, all the conditions of well-being that man has ever experienced or that the heart has ever conceived. This whole coming glory is, meanwhile, in the absolute prerogative of that wonderful man—the marvel of history—THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD—God manifest in the flesh—Jesus crucified and now exalted, in whom abides all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. What shall we say, then, but that Paul was a wise man, whose company we shall try to keep, when he said:

*“I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.”*

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