

THE EYES OF THE LORD THROUGH THE EARTH

Sermon by the Rev. W. H. Sedgwick, Preached in First Methodist Church, Charlottetown.

God's Omniscience—God is Always Present—All-Knowing—They Whose Hearts are Perfect Sit Under His Shadow With Great Delight Nor Fear to Trust Him.

Text:—"The eyes of the Lord run to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." 2 Cor. XVI, 9.

Human nature is always giving us surprises. It is seldom safe to venture judgment of a man. He is almost certain to turn out a bundle of perplexing contradictions. Like the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, human nature is part pure gold and part common clay. The rose springs out of the thorn, and in the midst of a field of waving grain, there are still some noxious weeds. Some people turn out not so good as we thought they might be, while others prove better than our thought of them. There is much in us waste, and many a seed, and plenty of passion run to seed, but a little good grain still. Browning's words are true of us all, even of the worst, even of the best.

They are true of Asa King of Judah. Read the fourteenth chapter of the book of the Chronicles, and you come away with the conviction that Asa is a king worthy of Judah and worthy of Judah's God. He marches through the verses of this chapter as a man of strength. And of the strength, this is the secret,—he feared God and knew no other fear. The Egyptians come against him with a fee outnumbering his own more than three to one. But Asa is not dismayed. He makes his prayer unto his God:—"Lord, He is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. It is the fine courageous cry of one of faith's heroes,—and it is the cry of victory.

But we turn over to this 10th Chapter, and we find the common clay among the gold, the weeds amid the waving grain. Asa falls,—falls, too, just where he seemed strongest, in faith and courage. A man's greatest danger is always at his strongest point. It is no longer Egypt that is against him, but Israel; and still "it is nothing with Thee to help,"—but there is no one to remind him of his former words and Asa forgets. He forgets and he falters. It is hard to trust an invisible ally: it is much easier to put trust in a prince who can be seen than in a God who cannot be seen. A league with Syria is soon drawn, and, for the moment, it proves sufficient, but another league is spoken.—Asa cannot rely on the king of Syria any more at the same time on the King of heaven. He has made his choice,—a foolish, faithless choice it is. Henceforth, he makes his prayer to man and not to God. Henceforth, his reign is harassed by disastrous wars, and through all the years down to his painful death, Asa reaps the harvest of that wretched bargain.

It is just after Israel had been driven off,—just at the moment when the Syrian league seems crowned with promise that Hamaui comes to Asa with the reminder of our text. Hamaui is a seer and in his true sight, this league which takes in Syria and leaves out God spells only disaster. He is not to be deceived by a fair beginning. He looks at things whole, and he knows that where God is not, success and prosperity can never be. The victory of that early day would be turned into mourning:—"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward them. Herein thou hast done foolishly." And once more Asa shows how human he is. The passion that has run to seed bursts forth. "Asa was wrath with the seer and put him in a prison house."—What a pitiable spectacle! What a sorry return for a faithful rebuke, a rebuke uttered solely by a desire for the king's welfare! The prophet's role was never a pleasant one. Men build sepulchres for the prophets, but only after they have stoned them to the death. It was not at what the seer said that Asa was wrath, but at what he left unsaid. The sting of the words was in that which they implied,—they were a rebuke of faithlessness, and Asa's course told him that the rebuke was well deserved. When a man winces under your touch you may settle in your mind that your finger is on the sore spot.

Understanding, then, the force that the words of the text had as they fell from the lips of the Hebrew seer,—understanding that they were spoken as a rebuke of the folly that trusted in princes instead of in God, let us come to the words themselves.—They speak of God. They declare their great truth concerning God, truths which concern us to-day quite as much as they concerned the kings and seers of Judah in the far past. (1) The text declares the omnipresence of God. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." There is no speech nor His line has gone out through all the earth, and His words to the end of the world. His going forth is from the end of heaven, and His circuit unto the ends of it. There is nothing hid from the heart of His universal presence. This, surely is something which is as full of importance for us to-day as it was for a Hamaui and Asa long ago. For if God is omnipresent, then the requirements of His law are universal, as binding here in Charlottetown as yonder in Judah. If God is everywhere, and everywhere the same,—and with him is no change, not the least shadow cast by turning,—then his laws are everywhere, and everywhere the same,—the same here

in Charlottetown as yonder in Judah. Rudyard Kipling's soldier, in his Mandala ballad, asks to be taken somewhere East of Suez, where the best is like the worst, where there are no Ten Commandments to restrain license. But in the geography of the Bible and of God, there is no such place. East of Suez or West of Suez, a man can never get away from the divine that is within himself. And for God there is neither East or West. There is no place where there are no Ten Commandments. There is no place where the Sermon on the Mount is out-dated like a last year's almanac. And thus, there is no place where God is not. "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in the hills, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand hold me." There are some things you said I can escape from. We may escape from our fellow: through grace, we may escape the guilt and power of sin; through heaven's mercy we may escape an eternally unlighted and hopeless. But there are two things from which no man can escape—himself and God. The one way only to flee from God, is to flee to God. The one way only to hide from God, is to hide in God.

(2) The text declares the omniscience of God.—"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." The eye gate is the great avenue of kings. I understand these words to imply, that God who is always present is all-knowing. There is nothing hid from the light of those eyes that run everywhere. All things are naked and open to them. "If I say surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me: Yea the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." This means that our life is watched, and that all that concerns us is known. When we enter a great jewelry establishment, it seems as if the place were only loosely superintended, and as if we could move about and handle gold and gems with impunity; but, in fact, the most severe supervision is exercised, and the stranger does not touch one precious thing without being watched most keenly so, in life, we handle the costliest treasures, time, health, culture, friendship, wealth, influence, and we seem at liberty to do as we please with these things, using and abusing them with impunity. But the eye of God is upon all His gifts. He knows the way we take. His understanding is perfect.

Now, both these truths which we have stated—God's omnipresence and His omniscience—have their sternness and they have their sweetness. The thought that "God is in this place," the thought that God knows all that concerns us, may be the most unwelcome reflection that the mind could entertain. Victor Hugo shows this in his poem on Conscience, in which he tells the tale of Cain murderer of his brother. Cain flees before the eye of God. For thirty days and thirty nights he holds on his weary way. At the end of that time, he reaches the ocean. "Let us stop here," he says, but as he sits down, his face turns pale—he has seen "in the mournful sky the eye" at the same place. His sons, full of awe, try to erect barrier between him and the eye—a tent, then a wall of iron, then a tower, then a city, but all in vain: "I see the eye still," cries the unhappy man. At last, they dig a tomb. The father is put into it. But, "Thou'lt overhead they closed the awful vault, the eye was in the tomb, and looked on Cain."

When a man's heart is not perfect to wards God, there is no more unwelcome truth than that of the ever present, all seeing eye of God. Conscience doth make cowards of us all, so that when the Lord God walks in our garden, we too would fain hide ourselves from His presence.

But there is a more winsome side to these great truths. They whose hearts are perfect toward God sit under His shadow with great delight. Jess in Barrie's Window in Thrums was one of these. "I turn over the pages of the Bible," she says, "but just when I come to 'Thou God seeest me,' I let the book lie in my lap, for since a body's sure o' that, they're sure o' all." Mrs. Browning was one of these.

"Oh the little birds sangest, And the little birds sangest, But I smiled to think God's greatness Flows around our incompleteness, Round our restlessness His rest."

When a man's heart is perfect toward God, there is a sweet attractiveness, a wondrous solace, a mighty inspiration, in the thought that God is man and that He knows. Read Psalm cxxxix. The Psalmist lifted up his eyes to the hills with quiet confidence and hope. Why? Because the hills were to him a sacrament assuring him that God stood within the shadow keeping watch above His own. "The Lord is thy keeper—thy watchman." It was a time when danger threatened down there in the valley where the Psalmist stood. In himself he had no help nor hope of help. But the great thought that this life was watched delivered him from the fear of falling and from that faltering of fear. "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. "Life can be hallowed by no thought more powerfully than by this, that

it is watched. Peace can be secured by no stronger trust than this, that the keeper of Israel assumes responsibility for us. Work can be inspired by no truer sense of honor than when we feel that God gives us freedom and safety for the doing of it.

(3) The text declares the omnipotence of God. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong, in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." The nations round about often had cause to doubt the strength of their Gods, but Judah never doubted the might of Jehovah. "The Lord is clothed with strength," cries the Psalmist. "Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary," says another. "And another—

"God is our refuge and our strength In straits a present aid; Therefore, although the earth remove We will not be afraid."

Another ascribes strength unto Jehovah thus: "Thou hast an arm that's full of power Thy hand is great in might; And thy right hand exceedingly Exalted is in might."

There is little in the omnipresence and omniscience of God for either fear or trust except these are joined with omnipotence. But in God we know that these are so joined. The all knowing is the all powerful. His name is Almighty. If there be a God at all, He must be infinite in power. The idea of omnipotence is wrapped up in the very thought of God. For a God who is not all powerful is not perfect, and God if He is at all, must be perfect. But Hamaui appeals not to metaphysics but to experience and to history. He reminds Asa of the rout of the Egyptians. He recalls how God showed Himself strong against them, and by the remembrance of the mighty acts which He had done, the seer rebukes Asa for his folly and faithlessness. And for us too, there is an appeal not of metaphysics alone, but much more to history and experience.

These, then, are the great thoughts which are in our text concerning God—His omnipresence, His omniscience, His omnipotence. These are thoughts, I think we shall all agree, which are as big with importance today as they have always been. And they are thoughts, too, familiar as they are, which we need to have brought freshly before us frequently. For it is still a difficult thing to walk by faith. It is always easier to trust in a power that is visible than to trust in an invisible power. "It is easier to love your brother whom you have not seen," said a friend to me the other day when one who did not attract him was speaking. However that may be, it is easier to trust in the power you see than in the power that you have not seen. And for this reason, the tempter is always strong to enter into alliance with some King of Syria; to make their friends with some mammon of unrighteousness which may afford harbor and defence in the day when our need is upon us. Some trust in horses and some in chariots. Some trust in brains and some in brawn. The allies which offer league and covenant are many.

But it is best today as always to trust in God. Blessed, yes, thrice blessed, is the people whose strength is in him. For "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." It is a most reassuring text this which we have had this morning. Who shall be weak when the Almighty becomes strong for him? What shall fail of accomplishment when the strong God begins to work? It is a most comforting text this. For what does it say? Not "whose life is perfect." There would be no gospel in it for us if that were what it said. But "whose heart is perfect." In all the singing gospels there is no more comforting word than that Peter's life was not perfect,—but his heart was true, he could look into the Master's deep eyes and say with utmost honesty:—"Lord, Thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love Thee."

We have been learning anew this morning to look into "those eyes of far-perception," and to say—"Lord, Thou knowest all things." Can we, with an honesty that reflects the honesty of God, continue as Peter continued—"Thou knowest that I love Thee"? Past sin, past folly, past failure, "I love Thee still?" Is the heart perfect, though the life is imperfect? Then there is one who shows himself strong for us. "I have prayed for Thee," He says, "that thy strength fail not,"—yes, and more than that. "I will perfect my strength in thy weakness. Thy necessity is my privilege. Thine extremity in my opportunity." Oh, it is a blessed thing to trust in our God. Why go we hunting after another alliance? "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed. As the mountains are round about them, so the Lord is round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Do the promises seem unstable as water? Venture upon them, and they shall prove as the very rock. Our God cannot deny Himself. He shows you Himself strong when men are ready to trust Him. He sees, He knows, He is able Venture on Him. Venture wholly. His power will make you that which you want to be. Walk out on His promises and you shall find that what the Lord has spoken He will perform.

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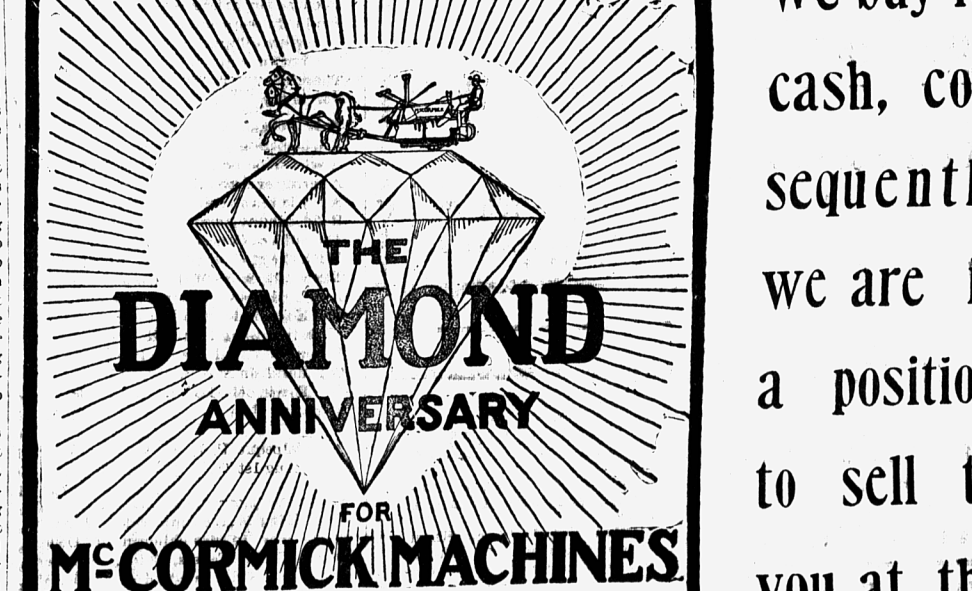
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