

ARTICLE IV.

JOSEPH AS A STATESMAN.

BY THE HON. JAMES MONROE, LL.D.

So general has been the interest, in our country, during the past few months, in the discussion of the merits of public men and public questions, from the standpoint of economic policy, that it may not be unsuitable to consider, in this place, the *Bible* idea of what fits a man for responsible trust under government. And as the concrete is not only more attractive, to most minds, than the abstract, but may even give us clearer views of abstract principles than we could attain without it, I have chosen for my subject, JOSEPH AS A STATESMAN.

I. In developing this theme, let us consider, first, some of the qualities which Joseph had exhibited before he was chosen to be ruler over Egypt, and see whether they were such as to justify his appointment. Afterwards we will inquire how far our ideal of a statesman is met by the character and ability which he displayed when actually in power as Pharaoh's prime minister.

1. To begin with the preparatory qualities, it is evident, in the first place, that he had been endowed by nature with remarkable talents for administration. He was a born organizer and manager. He was so made that wherever he went he must put things to rights. For disorder, unless they prevented him by force, he must substitute order; for embezzlement and fraud, uprightness and open dealing; for irresponsible recklessness, strict accountability; for bad and confused accounts, those good and me-

thodical; for waste and extravagance, economy and thrift; for disobedience and eye-service, obedience and fidelity; for dull-eyed indolence, bright-eyed industry; and for all slatternly and dirty methods, those of cleanness and scrupulous care. When one of the Greek philosophers was taken prisoner in battle, and exposed for sale as a slave by the enemy in the market-place, he was asked what he could do. "Proclaim," he replied, "that now there is an opportunity for one who would like to buy a master."

When Potiphar bought Joseph he bought a master—at least a great manager—without having it announced to him beforehand. When Joseph came into his house, he began taking charge of its interests, and every one gave place to him. Potiphar made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field. So perfect did his confidence in Joseph become, that it is said he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat.

When Joseph was sent to prison, on a false charge, this administrative ability was again displayed. So impressed by this was the keeper of the prison, that he soon committed all the prisoners to Joseph's hand, and whatsoever was done there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand, because the Lord was with him, and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper.

2. Again, when Joseph was called to power, he had already shown that he was a man of absolute fidelity to a trust.

When a mere boy of seventeen, he was placed by his father with his elder brothers in charge of the flock. He discovered evil conduct in these brothers, and reported it to his father. They highly disapproved of this course, and

hated him for it. A feeling like theirs, and, I suppose, for like reasons, exists to the present day. But Joseph reasoned that the family had common interests the proper management of which was essential to the common welfare; that his father, under God, had the supervision of these interests, and could make this supervision successful only by having full knowledge of the manner in which each member of the family was performing his part; that he himself had been intrusted by his father with a share of the common responsibility, and that, having discovered that his brothers had gone wrong, fidelity required that he should inform his father, so that, by timely admonition, the evil might be corrected. This duty he performed without regard to the consequences to himself. The needed admonition, though no doubt given, was disregarded. The brothers went from bad to worse, but the pitiful relations in which they were finally placed to their brother, abundantly vindicated his conduct.

When tempted and importuned to sin in Potiphar's house, and virtually threatened with some great calamity if he did not yield, his fidelity to his trust was again conspicuous. His master had intrusted him with all that he had: he would not betray him. God had bountifully blessed him: he would be true to his God.

3. And this brings me to notice another quality which was characteristic of him from early youth; which was with him, as we have seen, in Potiphar's house; which shone forth when he was in prison; which was strong upon him when he was first brought into the presence of Pharaoh, and which was indeed the controlling force of his whole career and his whole life,—and that was his constant recognition of his accountability to God. God was his sovereign, and he would obey him; his father, and he would love and serve him; his friend, and he would commune with him; his benefactor, and he would consecrate all to

him. For God he felt a sweet and awful reverence, which sanctified every purpose of his heart. His mind had a habit of constant reference to God in all that he undertook. "I have heard," said Pharaoh, "that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it." Joseph replied, "It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." "God," he exclaimed at another time, "hath made me forget all my toil." To his brothers who bitterly remembered their past sin, he said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life." But the whole history so abounds with these references to the Divine Providence, that justice cannot be done to it by a few brief quotations. "I fear God," was the declaration of Joseph to his brethren, and no quality is so well fitted as the fear of God to inspire and strengthen and elevate statesmanship. With what an added glory it gilds the names of such men as William of Orange and Hampden and Wilberforce and Gladstone! No quality, when sincerely cherished, will sooner win the sympathy of the people. Bismarck has said, on several occasions, that Germans fear nothing but God. Some German university, anxious, I suppose, to encourage this nascent sentiment in the Iron Chancellor, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, which he accepted with thanks. Let us hope that reverence for God may be a growing grace of his character.

4. I add that the character of Joseph appears to have been, from his youth, in all respects irreproachable. No charge that was true could be made against it. He seems to have been as nearly faultless as any mere man mentioned in sacred history. There was one occasion when, if anything could truly have been urged against him, it would certainly have been done; and that was when Pharaoh nominated Joseph to his royal council to be, next to himself, chief ruler over Egypt. The proposal thus suddenly

to advance a Hebrew slave, taken, perhaps, but an hour before from prison, over the heads of all the old nobility, to the premiership of the kingdom, would naturally excite a feeling of jealousy in the minds of the great lords of the court. It is noticeable that when Joseph, with no thought of the result as to himself, advised that some discreet and wise man should be set over the land in preparation for the approaching calamity, Pharaoh's councillors expressed their approval—the thing seemed good in the eyes of all his servants; but when he asked them what better man than Joseph could be selected for this purpose, they appear to have been silent—the record gives no account of any reply. I cannot resist the conviction that they had something of the feeling, though I hope not in so bitter and murderous a form, with which Haman learned, after having recommended a public triumph to the man whom the king delighted to honor, that Mordecai, and not himself, was the man—something of the feeling with which the princes of Darius saw that Daniel was to be made chief president of the realm. If anything could have been said against the character of Joseph, or even against his personal appearance and manner, now was the time to say it. But not only was his character impregnable, but his bearing was faultless. A handsome young man of thirty, with a goodly and well-favored person, he bore himself in Pharaoh's presence with deference and with self-respect. Slavery and imprisonment had not hurt the tone of his native manliness. All he lacked, when he left the prison, to make him appear before Pharaoh, as a chivalrous gentleman, was that he should shave himself and change his raiment, and this he had found time to do. And so the lords of Egypt, when asked if Joseph was not the man for the hour, were silent. But where were *Potiphar* and *his wife*? Why did they not come to the help of these disappointed nobles, with their miserable falsehood? Now is their opportunity.

Let them speak now or forever after hold their peace. Perhaps they were dead. The wicked sometimes do not live out half their days. If they were living, Potiphar may have discovered, by subsequent transactions, that, on certain subjects, the word of his wife must be taken with some allowance. And Potiphar's wife may have come to feel that the best thing that could happen to her was never to have her lie mentioned again.

I have said that Pharaoh, so far as we can learn, could get no answer from his lords to the question which he asked. And so he answered for himself. "And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; and he made him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they said before him, 'Bow the knee': and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt."

5. Again we notice that Joseph was appointed to office on the sole ground of his merit. No effort was made by him or by any other human being to obtain the place for him. No petitions were circulated, no deputations waited upon Pharaoh, no favorite's favorite was quietly solicited to use his influence, no one even asked the king's wife to talk with her husband, in order that this man might have a cabinet position. He was not a "favorite son," nor even a "dark horse." There was nothing to give him the place but simply his fitness for it. Pharaoh's reasons for appointing him have been given to the world. "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, 'Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled.'" Joseph had given two evidences of broad statesmanship: first, he had clearly foreseen a great national calamity which no one else could have foreseen; and second, he had prepared a plan to meet

it. Pharaoh thought that the man who had done all this was the man to put the plan into execution, and he committed the work to his hands. It was a piece of sound practice in the civil service. There was, practically, a competitive examination, in which Joseph was first, and all others were nowhere. There was no other human being who had any idea of the future evil or of the way to avert it.

II. Having thus spoken of some qualifications for public position possessed by Joseph before he took office, let us next briefly consider the qualities which he exhibited after he came into power, or how he did his work as a statesman.

I. And here I remark, first of all, that when appointed to the place of prime minister, he at once and wholly gave himself to the duties of the office. To him the position was no sinecure. He knew that it would task all his powers to fill it successfully, and he decided not to spare himself in meeting the responsibility laid upon him. He was no courtier, and he had no jealousies. He cherished no malice and he retained no grudges—a quality of highest value in a statesman. He had no enemies to punish. He had kept his mind pure and sweet. Sunshine itself was not whiter or sweeter or more luminous than the soul of Pharaoh's chief ruler. In return for the terrible wrong which his brothers had done him, after having administered to them enough of loving discipline to make them see and repent of their sin, he gave them a possession in the best of the land and nourished them with bread according to their families. He had no thought of staying at court to watch against the intrigues of those who wished to supplant him. Probably he did not believe in the existence of such persons, or, if he did, he had no time to give them. He lived in the field. The sacred writer says, "And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went throughout all the land of Egypt." To protect the

land from the coming evil, we now have a man well equipped in mind and heart, with a clean conscience and a serene breast, a man free from self-seeking and with an eye single to his duty, a man with nothing on his mind but the work to be done.

2. It has been said that no man can become a great statesman by merely attending to the petty details of administration. He must have an object that will fill the mind and enlarge the heart. And this brings me to remark that the history of Joseph meets this requirement. His objects were noble, and beneficent, and worthy of a great ruler. He undertook to save a great race and a large part of the world from extinction. A famine for Egypt meant a famine also for Abyssinia, Arabia, Syria, and Palestine, and sometimes even for the remoter, populous regions around the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates. The causes of this are well understood. A writer in Lange's Commentary upon Genesis says, "Aside from the fact that Egypt, in the early times, was a granary for the neighboring countries, and that they therefore suffered also from every famine that came upon it, it is a thing to be noticed that the rain-season for these lands, as well as the rising of the Nile, was conditioned on northern rainy winds." "All countries," says Moses in the book of Genesis, "came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn, because the famine was sore in all lands." There was no presumption in the claim of Joseph that God had sent him into Egypt as his agent to accomplish a vast, beneficent plan. "God," said he to his brethren, "meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive." To the same effect is a passage in the 105th Psalm: "Moreover he called for a famine upon the land, he brake the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant. . . . The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him

lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance, to bind his princes at his pleasure and to teach his senators wisdom." So far then as the greatness of his object is concerned, no statesman in history appears with more dignity than Joseph. The contemplation of it fills and warms the imagination, and imparts to the mind a noble expansion. But for some plan like that of Joseph, the highest civilization then known to the world must have perished with the dwellers by the Nile; the church of God in the earth must have been blotted out in the persons of the patriarchs and their families, and many thousands of people in adjoining countries must have perished. It was not Oriental extravagance, but a swift insight into the magnitude of the occasion, which made Pharaoh bestow upon Joseph the name "Zaphnath-paaneah," which in Lange's work is translated "Preserver of Life," or "Saviour of the World."

3. Once more, not only was Joseph a statesman with a grand object, but the means which he employed were worthy of the object, and were chosen with the greatest wisdom. His measures were adequate and reasonable—they would accomplish the object, they were not oppressive, and they were carried out with the greatest tact and skill.

To appreciate this it may be necessary to look a moment at the economic difficulties which he had to meet. Political economists tell us that a young nation which has prospered so far as to have a full year's subsistence in advance, has taken an important step in the way of progress. It is stated by statisticians that the aggregate wealth of Great Britain, which is the richest country in the world, is only equal to five or six times—let us say six times—its annual production. Its expenditure is less than its production, because it is constantly adding to its wealth. Hence it is estimated that its total wealth is equal to about eight times its annual expenditure. If, therefore, production in Great Britain were suddenly to cease, and the nation had to fall

back upon its accumulated wealth for subsistence, then, if expenditure were to continue as free as in the past, at the end of eight years the country would be reduced to absolute beggary. The lands, the houses, the factories, the docks, the harbors, the ships, the railways, the cattle, might still be there; but they would not belong to the people of England, but to somebody who should have advanced upon them the means of subsistence. I do not like to anticipate, but I cannot help thinking what joy it would then give to a great people, standing on the brink of extinction, could it be suddenly announced that they could be put back into possession of all that they had had, with production renewed, on condition that henceforth they would pay one-fifth of their annual production to the crown. And what honor would be paid to any prime minister, no matter whether it might be Lord Salisbury or Mr. Gladstone, who should have carried them through this dreary period of decay, and brought them to so happy a result!

Our knowledge of Egypt is not complete enough for the purposes of accurate comparison, but her ability to pass through long periods of unproductiveness must have been much less than that of Great Britain. To attempt to name a definite ratio between the aggregates of wealth in the two countries would be mere conjecture, but I deem it safe to say, and in this I think I should be sustained by thoughtful readers of history, that the wealth per capita of Great Britain, measured by its value in the necessaries of life, was more than double that of Egypt. Moreover the expenses of the Egyptian government were very great for so small a country. Her officials lived luxuriously, and her Pharaohs thought it necessary to support an army of four hundred and ten thousand men. Production in Egypt was mostly agricultural, and when the crops failed, she was speedily impoverished. In fruitful years she had considerable manufactures and trade, but when there was no more

corn, these also languished. Years, therefore, when the Nile failed to water and to fertilize the soil were years of terrible destitution. There were now coming seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. The problem, therefore, was, how to make the years of plenty, while they lasted, support the seven million of the population, maintain the army, and pay the expenses of the government, and yield a surplus large enough to support the people, government, and army through the seven years of nearly total unproductiveness. I almost think it the most difficult problem that any statesman ever successfully solved. One thing to be done would of course be to warn the people of the coming famine, to exhort them against waste, to urge them to lay up all the corn they could spare for the time of want. This would make an effective impression upon the thoughtful and prudent, but very little upon the mass of the people. The improvidence of the Eastern races is proverbial. An average Egyptian would hardly be able to see why he should lay up corn this year, for a famine that is to come seven years hence. This may seem strange, but some of our own people cannot be taught to save something in July for the following January. Joseph's plan, therefore, was that the government should supplement the partial preparation which was all that the people could be persuaded to make, by collecting each year in the form of a tax, a liberal share of the corn produced, and storing it up until it should be needed. When explaining Pharaoh's dream, he named one-fifth as the share to be taken, but from the language used in describing the execution of his plan, I infer that, in practice, he may have taken more.

We shall now see Joseph visiting all parts of Egypt, organizing the people, appointing subordinates, building store-houses, punishing peculators. Even during the years of plenty, he will encounter many difficulties. There will

be dissatisfaction, impatience, irritation, even mutiny, among the people. Some will think the tax too high; others will wonder that so much power should have been placed in the hands of a Hebrew slave; others still, as one year of plenty succeeds to another, will be skeptical about the years of famine, and will begin to think that they are an invention of the government to enrich itself. Those who are too indolent or too dull to think will have positive opinions as to the wisdom of his system; those who are too selfish to coöperate will doubt his disinterestedness; those who are watching their opportunity to steal will suspect his integrity. He must soothe, explain, rebuke, or punish, as the case may require. He must have courage, tact, patience, good-nature, self-control. But, at length, the years of plenty are passed, and the years of famine have begun. The people are encouraged to live as long as possible upon what they have saved, and then the store-houses are opened. Now Joseph can enforce a strict economy in the use of grain among the people, by limiting the amount to be sold to individuals or families. The people brought him money to be exchanged for corn so long as it lasted, and next sold him their cattle, and finally their lands. They even speak of their bodies as being for sale, and Joseph himself says, "Behold, I have bought you this day." We must not make the mistake, however, of supposing that this implies a condition of chattel slavery, such as was once known in our Southern States. The context shows that it meant nothing more than what was implied in their having parted with all they had—their money, their cattle, and their lands—and being now in a state of dependence upon the generosity of Joseph. They could ask to be nothing more than servants to the king. Everything was gone, and their condition was indeed sad enough. But if you will once more read the passage, I think you will feel that the cheerful frankness with which they acknowledge their

beggared condition, implies that the character and the very face of Joseph have inspired them with hope of something better. I think they were not altogether taken by surprise when Joseph exclaimed, "Yes, you are beggars, but you shall not remain so. Years of plenty are now coming again. Go back to your lands and sow them once more. I will give you the seed for the first year, and you shall possess the lands as heretofore, except that you shall henceforth pay one fifth of the annual produce into the king's treasury." "Four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones." I don't remember to have noticed whether the Egyptians were in the habit of shouting in honor of their rulers, but if they were, I will venture to say that old Nile had never before been so startled in his bed as by the shout that went up from the people that day. It was indeed a great deliverance for the people—a great triumph for the ruler. To me it appears to be the best single piece of work ever done by a statesman.

Under the circumstances, the tax of one-fifth of the produce was certainly low. No doubt it was higher than the former tax, which is conjectured to have been a tenth. It was just that the government should receive something for its extraordinary service, and it may have been rendered necessary by its growing wants. If the increase in taxation was a tenth, then that tenth is the measure of the final injury of this unparalleled famine to the people of Egypt. Did any other statesman ever reduce such a calamity to so small a minimum?

The reasonableness of this tax of one-fifth of the produce will be still more evident if we compare it with rates prevalent among ourselves at the present day. In most growing Ohio towns, the property-holder is taxed from twenty-five to thirty mills to the dollar. If we assume the

average income of the citizen from all his property to be six per cent, or sixty mills to the dollar—an estimate which is high enough—he then pays to the Government five-twelfths or one-half of his “produce.” If we can pay a tax like this without complaint, the Egyptian under Joseph certainly had no reason to feel oppressed by the payment of one-fifth.

I must not leave this part of my subject without noticing a grave charge made by some critics against Joseph as a man and as a statesman. It is said that although an able minister, at heart he was a courtier; and that, in the interest of the king, he inflicted a permanent injury upon Egypt by changing the whole body of agriculturists from a community of freeholders to a community of tenants of the crown. Before the time of Joseph, it is contended, the people owned the land themselves; after his time the king owned it. Joseph thus destroyed that class who are the pride and strength of every land where they exist—the yeomanry. At first I felt perplexed by this. On the surface of the narrative it seemed to be true. I remembered the just pride with which our New England ancestors regarded their warrantee deeds to the rocks on which they stood, and I said it would have been a great calamity to them to have been changed into mere tenants of the President of the United States. But it soon occurred to me to inquire in what sense the lands of the people were theirs before the time of Joseph, and in what sense they were Pharaoh's after that time. No doubt that before Joseph the people called the land theirs, but was it theirs in a sense which prevented the dispossession of the farmers of large districts when the Pharaoh wished to give an estate to a successful soldier? Was it theirs in a sense which would protect them from a repartition of the land whenever the royal policy required it? Certainly not. The king was an absolute monarch. His will was law. He was the only leg-

islative power. He made the laws, and he made the judges who interpreted and applied the laws. Mr. Samuel Birch, the keeper of the Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum, a great authority, says, in his edition of Wilkinson's Egypt, that a new Pharaoh re-invested even the territorial aristocracy with their lands, either on the ground that they were only feudal tenants, or that the king was the landlord of the whole country. Wilkinson, following Herodotus, states that Rameses the Great ordered a repartition of lands among the peasants. This was indeed later than the time of Joseph, but the kings before Joseph were certainly not less absolute than those who followed him. The only security which the people had, before Joseph, for the continued possession of their lands, was found in the forbearance and good sense of their kings. This security generally did not fail them, sometimes it did. Substantially the same state of things existed after Joseph, except that growing wealth and civilization were favorable to fair dealing, permanency, and good order. Further, under the arrangement made by Joseph, which appears to have continued at least until the time of Moses, and probably much longer, the gratitude of the people to the government as their preserver, and the gratification of the government over its doubled and now adequate revenues from the lands, no doubt made the mutual relations of king and landowners more satisfactory and less liable to disturbance than they had been before Joseph's time. I will venture to say that the title of the farming class to their lands was treated with more respect, and was more like that of fee simple, after the new system had been introduced by Joseph than it ever had been before. So much for the charge that Joseph deprived the Egyptians of their ancient title to the soil.

Such, very imperfectly presented, was the statesmanship of Joseph. The subject is full of lessons upon none of

which can we dwell, but any one of which might be expanded into an essay. In what other portion of human history is the providence of God, in its relation both to public and to private life, more wonderful, more encouraging, or better fitted to produce faith in him? Where else can a finer example be found of that courage in national affairs which faces an appalling calamity at its worst, abating nothing from its terrors, and then prepares to meet it and avert its worst effects? From what other leaf of human experience do we obtain so clear a view of the value, the blessing, the irresistible might, whether for the statesman or the man, of that greatest quality of the soul which is variously named the fear of God, personal integrity, a clear conscience, a heart of love, disinterestedness, devotion to the common welfare? Disinterestedness! how respectable, how prevailing, how universally approved it is! It is the very soul of successful statesmanship. It was the animating spirit of the statesmanship of Joseph; and when that spirit shall fully take possession of and control the statesmanship of our own country, in that one expression of the divine goodness, all the dark problems that perplex us will be solved.

From this study of Joseph as a statesman, we turn, with unusual satisfaction, to consider the character of the new administration which has just assumed power at Washington. I would not introduce, in this place, anything which could be thought an expression of party feeling, but I have a strong impression that good men of all parties are looking forward hopefully to the next four years. It is occasion for deep thankfulness to all patriotic minds, that a President has recently been inaugurated, over forty-five States, who, for many years, with unaffected piety, has worshiped God as his Sovereign and his Redeemer. The genuineness of his religious character, which has not been questioned; his single-hearted devotion to such measures

as, in his honest judgment, will best promote the common welfare; the sympathy which he has constantly expressed for sound morals, general education, reverence for law, and honest government; his irreproachable private character, and the estimable personal qualities which he has exhibited in all the relations of life; his true friendliness to all Americans; the ability and candor of his official papers; the sound judgment, the moderation, and freedom from personality which distinguished the innumerable speeches which he made during the canvass; the affability, the dignity, and the courteous reserve with which he received the thousands of visitors who waited upon him at his home; the high character of the officers whom he has gathered about him in his Cabinet,—all these qualities and acts, which remind us of the statesmanship of Joseph, furnish ground for hope that the administration upon which we have now entered will prove to be one of the most useful, one of the most catholic, and one of the purest which the nation has ever seen.