

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

REVELATION XXI. 5.

'And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.'—R.V.

I.

THE SPEAKER.

1. The Speaker is God the Father. Throughout the whole Book of Revelation, says Swete, 'He that sitteth on the throne' is the Almighty Father, as distinguished from the Incarnate Son. And so it is probable that here for the first time in the book we listen to the words of God Himself, for it is the first time that 'He that sitteth on the throne' is represented as speaking. His words go to the centre of things and reach to their circumference, and they are gracious in their purpose: 'Behold, I make all things new.'

2. Is there a difficulty in the representation of the Father as Judge supreme? The doctrine seems to join issue with Jn 5²¹, 'For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son'; and indeed with the whole current of early Christian tradition. Swete finds a possible reconciliation of the two views in the oneness of the Father and the Son (Jn 10³⁰)—when the Son acts, the Father acts with and through Him (Jn 5¹⁹). St. Paul speaks of the judgment-seat of Christ (2 Co 5¹⁰), and also of the judgment-seat of God (Ro 14¹⁰).

It would seem as if the threefold Personality had become united in one name. No more we hear of 'Let us make,' we are now confronted by an intenser term, 'Behold, I make all things new.' It would seem as if each Person in the Divine Trinity had times of special expression and times of special relation to nature and to man and to providence and to destiny; now it is the Father; and the other Persons of the Trinity are concealed, as it were, behind His glory: now it is the Son, the only-begotten Son, the Saviour of the world: and, finally, it is the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who rules the whole mystery of human development. And what if now the Three should in a peculiar and definite sense be One—as if the Three-One should all be speaking in, 'Behold, I make all things new.'¹

II.

THE PLACE OF THE PROMISE.

There are three texts which should be taken together:

¹ J. Parker, *The City Temple Pulpit*, i. 4.

'And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Gn 1³¹).

'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaleth in pain together (RVm 'with us') until now' (Ro 8²²).

'And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new' (Rev 21⁵).

God's world is the subject of these three verses. The first describes God's world as it was; the second, God's world as it is; the third, God's world as it shall be.

1. God's world as it was when He made it. The report of it is—and it is God's own report—that it was very good. It could not be improved. It was perfect. God's eye saw no flaw in it. God was satisfied and delighted with it. It was all glory and beauty, music and song, happiness and peace. The Greek word for 'world' contains the idea of order. Nothing was out of place in God's world. But the word 'very good' has more than a material and more than an artistic meaning. It is a moral word. It means that there was a contrast between the world as God made it and the world as it afterwards became. It means that there was no sin in God's world as He made it.

2. God's world as it is. It is no longer very good. Ichabod is written across the face of it. Its glory has departed. Not that the primal order has become pure chaos. God 'in his heaven' has been working in the world from the beginning until now. Wherever His hand is not interfered with by the will of man there is order still. Nature is even continually restoring the beauty that man has defaced. It is the moral world and all that depends upon it, the sphere in which the will of man works, that has suffered an eclipse. For sin has entered, and with sin death: the first a murder, the last a suicide. 'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people' (Jer 9¹). 'God's in His heaven'; but it is prophecy, not history, to say 'All's right with the world.'

3. God's world as it shall be. The first thing is that God is to come down and dwell in it. His tabernacle is with men, and He will dwell with them. The next, that He will recognize and

be recognized by His people. They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And the third thing is that death and sorrow and pain shall be no more. But how is it that these three things are brought to pass? They are brought to pass through 'the blood of the Lamb.' There has been a sacrifice made for sin and uncleanness, and the sacrifice has taken away sin. When He said, 'It is finished,' He made an end of sin, and opened the way for God to dwell amongst men, opened the way for their reconciliation and fellowship, for the removal of all the things that follow in the path of sin.

III.

NEWNESS NOT NOVELTY.

It is not a new world; it is the old world made new. It is not creation; it is redemption. God has not destroyed the world, to begin again; He has renewed the inhabitants of the old world in the spirit of their minds.

There are two words in the original which are necessarily translated alike—'new'—in our versions. Of these two adjectives, one signifies *new* (*v̄eos*) in relation to *time*, the other *new* in relation to *quality* (*kauv̄os*)—the first temporal novelty; the second novelty intellectual or spiritual. The first indicates that which is young, recent in time; the other that which not only succeeds something else in time, but which in idea springs out of it, and not only succeeds but supersedes it.¹

So this word, 'I make all things new,' is not the announcement of a perfectly new thing; it does not proclaim an act at that moment done; it is not an exercise, as it were, of instantaneous Omnipotence. This is the completing and the perfecting, rather, of the work of the long ages, the seal of a mighty progression, the top-stone of the great temple, the finishing of the work of the Sabbath of God from the periods of the First Creation.²

To make things new is not the same as to make new things. To make new things is the work of the hand; to make things new is the work of the heart. Whenever one sits upon the throne of the heart, all things are made new. They are made so without changing a line, without altering a feature. Enthrone in your heart an object of love, and you have renewed the universe. You have given an added note to every bird, a fresh joy to every brook, a fairer tint to every flower.³

¹ W. Alexander, *The Great Question*, 284.

² D. Wright, *The Power of an Endless Life*, 257.

³ G. Matheson, *Times of Retirement*, 92.

IV.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE NEWNESS.

1. The first evidence will be *the death-blow of evil*. What are the present evils under which the creation groans and travails? Suffering is one. It is Stoicism, not Christianity, that says suffering is no evil. Sickness and weakness are evils; feebleness of hand and step; toil and want; old age, solitary and begrimed and despised; sorrow and crying, not to be comforted because the loved one is not. All these things will depart on that day, because that will be the execution-day of sin.⁴

2. The second evidence of the renovation will be *the re-instalment of God*. The Seer saw no temple therein. Why? Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. He saw no sun. Why? Because the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. What is the occasion of sickness? It is because the Healer is absent from the earth. Of Death? Because the Life-giver is not at hand. Of loneliness? Because sin has taken away our Lord. But thine eye shall see the King in His beauty, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.⁵

V.

THE RESULTS OF THE NEWNESS.

1. The 'far-off' brought nigh. He who was a stranger to God becomes a child in his Father's house. An heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. When John Wesley was dying, in a brief moment of returning consciousness, he asked, 'What was the text that I preached upon last Sunday?' And when one standing beside him repeated, 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that ye through His poverty might become rich,' he exclaimed, 'Yes; that is it. There is no other.'

A modest, gentle, kindly business man once stood before me with shining eyes, telling of the joy that had come to him as the result of his giving himself in middle life to the Lord. 'To think,' he said, 'that for more than twenty years I have tried to do this for myself and could not; and now in one hour the Lord has done it for me.'⁶

2. Bitterness turned into blessing. A wonderful sentence comes to us from the Middle Ages. Out

⁴ C. J. Vaughan, *Family Prayer and Sermon Book*, i. 124.

⁵ C. J. Vaughan, *ibid.* 125.

⁶ H. A. Stinson, *The New Things of God*, 14.

of the turmoil, the vice and the bloodshed of the Florence of that day, we hear the voice of the great poet as he says in his immortal words: 'In sua voluntade è nostra pace' ('In the doing of His will lies our peace'). How did Dante know that? Has any thought risen higher than that through all the centuries? In the doing of God's will, the surrendering of ourselves to His appointment, the accepting of the cup because He sent it, is not only the discipline we need, not only the promise of strength and attainment, but, far more than this, the peace, the deep abiding divine peace of the soul.

In a Christian Conference one of the speakers during an interval pointed out to his neighbour a man in the audience. Once a notorious drunkard, he said, for a year he has been so changed that it is like a transformation. 'And do you see that lad?' he asked. 'That is his son. I met him one day on the street, and I said, "Well, Willie, how are you getting on now?" "Oh, splendid!" he said. "Oor hame's juist like a magic lantern since faither stoppit drinkin'!"'

3. The unproductive become fruitful. The promise is, 'Ye shall bear much fruit.' This is to be the measure and the reward of a true discipleship. This is Christ's reward. This is how He is to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. There is that in every heart which responds to this thought. We can all understand something of the feeling of the farmer leaning on his gate and looking at the waving fields of grain about him. He has planted and cultivated and waited for the harvest, and here it is. He has made the waste land fruitful, and his soul is filled with a supreme satisfaction. Look at the light in the face of the young father over his new-born child, or the joy of the mother as for the first time she presses her infant to her heart. Life has produced life. Fruitfulness has come, the blessed gift of God. We all know its significance; even the dullest and weariest long for its privileges.¹

Sir Wilfrid Lawson the elder (father of the late baronet), on reaching middle life, had a dangerous illness; and when brought (as he thought) to death's door, and when the unseen realities of the eternal world seemed breaking upon him, he longed for religious instruction, guidance, and consolation. This he did not expect to find among the worldly or sporting parsons of the neighbouring parishes, and so he sent for a humble Presbyterian minister from the neighbouring hamlet of Blennerhasset—a Mr. Walton—who by his instructions and prayers, by God's blessing, brought peace of mind to Sir Wilfrid, so that when he rose from his

sick-bed it was with a new view of life and a new purpose in living. In a word, he had become a true earnest Christian upon personal inquiry and conviction, and his tastes and inclinations and aims were completely changed, and he determined henceforth to spread those views of truth that had changed and blessed him, by devoting time and thought and means to their diffusion among his neighbours and friends. Having obtained a peace of mind never known before, he was anxious that those around should share the same priceless treasure. The Scriptures were a new revelation to him, and with strong faith in Jesus Christ as a loving, ever-present Saviour, he felt constrained by example and word and walk to lead others to trust in and serve Him.²

VI.

THE EXTENT OF IT.

The words of the Seer are suggested by Is 43^{18, 19}: 'Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing.' But, says Swete, the scope of the old prophecy is enlarged indefinitely by the words 'all things.' All the fruits of the New Covenant are included.

1. Man is included. The new world begins in the human heart, and it occupies every part of the personality, and every aspect of the life. By his words a man is now justified. His thoughts are brought into captivity to the mind of Christ. Moreover, the newness covers the relation between man and man. There will be the fulfilment of both commandments—the first and greatest, and also the second which is like unto it.

Dr. Parker said in New York: 'God and one man could make any other religion, but it takes God and two men to make Christianity! The pulpit, as I say, has forgotten that two men were necessary. It has talked of the relations of God to the individual soul, and it has dealt with the supreme command to love God supremely; but it has forgotten that the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is simply the application of the same law to man in his manward relation, and that it has precisely the same origin and precisely the same sanctions as the other command. If one is binding, both are binding. If the Church is under obligations to teach the world the love of God, it is under like obligations to teach and to exemplify the love of our fellow-men. We have thought of Christianity, the teachings of Christ, as a circle drawn round the individual as its centre. Hereafter we must think of Christianity, the teachings of Jesus, as an ellipse drawn round the individual and society as two foci. Jesus laid down certain social laws for the Kingdom as a society. He laid down certain social laws to which we shall have occasion to return later.'³

² G. W. E. Russell, *Life of Sir Wilfrid Lawson*.

³ J. Strong, in *Christian World Pulpit*, lxvi. 18.

When the organist Mr. John Zundel was converted and came into the church, he said to me one morning, 'It seems that everything in the world is new. Last night I prayed; but not as you do.' I asked him what he meant, and he answered: 'I do not speak my prayers.' 'Well,' I asked, 'how do you pray?' 'On the piano always,' said he. That was true. He would sit down at his piano when in a worshipping mood, shut his eyes, and pray with his fingers. I did not wonder at it when I heard his music.¹

2. The whole creation is included. For 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' Change the man, and you change his world. The new self will make all around it as good as new, though no actual change should pass on it; for, to a very wonderful extent, a man creates his own world. We project the hue of our own spirit on things outside. A bright and cheerful temper sees all things on their sunny side. A weary, uneasy mind drapes the very earth in gloom. Lift from a man his load of inward anxiety, and you change the aspect of the universe to that man; for, if 'to the pure all things are pure,' it is no less true that to the happy all things are happy.²

Dr. S. Reynolds Turner, who superintends a Chinese colporteur in Amoy, writes: 'He is one of the most earnest Christians I have met in China, and a real red-hot evangelist. In visiting our stations I have seen a good deal of him on his native heath, and one remark he made sticks to me, since it was so strange from a Chinaman. We were standing on a hillside overlooking the sea, which at that part of the coast is dotted over with islands, and I was revelling in the beauty of the scene under a bright sun and clear skies. Suddenly he turned to me, and said, "Isn't it beautiful?" I agreed heartily, but added that I thought Chinamen did not, as a rule, pay attention to such things. "Ah!" he said, "I never saw anything about me, or thought anything beautiful or worth looking at, until I became a Christian; but since then the world gets daily more beautiful, and the more I see of it the more I comprehend our dear Father in heaven."³

I remember, as though it were yesterday, something

that happened in my own life at least thirty-seven years ago. I was a boy, and there came to my father's house a young man who had been brought to Christ in some services my father had been conducting away up among the Welsh hills. This young man one day was out in our garden, and talking to me about all sorts of things. He interested me as a child, and I loved him. Suddenly he stooped down and took a leaf from a nasturtium plant, put it on his hand, and said to me, 'Did you ever see anything so beautiful?' And I looked, and saw all the veins, and the exquisite beauty of it all. Then he said, 'Do you know, I never saw how beautiful that leaf was until six months ago, when I gave myself to Christ?' I have never forgotten that. How true I know that to be in my own experience!⁴

But the change is not only in the man himself. Creation recognizes the change in him and responds. Where he leads, it follows. If he mourns, it will lament. If he pipes to it, it will dance.

Some travellers once vainly tried to awaken a wonderful echo. Then a rough bugler by the roadside played a simple scale down the instrument. At once the echo answered. The hills sounded far and farther off as if with church bells, peal on peal, chime on chime, until they who had listened almost wept to lose that silver music in the enchanted distance. Let us play the simple old scale. All the magic is in the echo. That makes the old sounds new.⁵

LITERATURE.

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¹ H. W. Beecher, *Lectures on Preaching*, 72.

J. Oswald Dykes, *Sermons*, 261.

³ Report of B. and F. Bible Society, 1906.

⁴ Dr. Campbell Morgan, in *British Weekly*, 1909.

⁵ W. Alexander, *The Great Question*, 307.