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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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## DIVINITY.

### THE WITNESSING CHURCH.

A SERMON,

BY THE REV. JOHN HARRIS.

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God."—Isaiah xliii. 12.

[CONTINUED.]

First, then, I would illustrate the great truth, that the Church of God is expressly designed, in its relative capacity, and as the depository of the knowledge of salvation, to be his witness to the world.

Passing by all the interesting illustrations of this truth which might be drawn from antediluvian and patriarchal history, let us confine our attention to the Jewish and Christian churches. And here, on viewing these churches together, as parts of a great whole, we are instantly struck with the different ways in which they concur to answer their design as witnesses for God. The Jewish church was a local stationary witness; and the duty of the world was to come and receive its testimony: the Christian church is not local and stationary, but is to go to the world. The Jewish church was an oracle, and the world was expected to come and inquire at its shrine; the Christian church is an oracle also—but instead of waiting for the world to come to it, it is commanded to go into all the world, and to testify the gospel of the grace of God to every creature.

In accordance with this representation of the Jewish church, we find that it contained every prerequisite for answering its end as a stationary witness for God; nothing was omitted calculated to promote this object; its early history was a history of miracles, to excite the attention, and draw to itself the eyes of the wonder-loving world; its ritual was splendid and unique; its members were distinguished in character from those of every other community on the face of the earth; its creed, or testimony, was eminently adapted to the existing state of the world—for it proclaimed a God, and promised a Saviour; its members possessed a personal interest in the truth of the testimony they gave; and, what was especially important, its geographical position was central. That large portion of the earth, whose waters flow into the Mediterranean, is the grand historical portion of the world, as known to the ancients. Judea was situated in the midst of it, like the sun in the centre of the solar system. Placed at the top of the Mediterranean, it was, during each successive monarchy, always within sight of the nations; and its temple-fires, like the Pharos of the world, were always flinging their warning light across the gross darkness of heathenism—protesting against idolatry, witnessing for the one living and true God, inviting the nations to come and worship before him, and foretelling the advent of One whose light should enlighten the world.

Thus studiously adapted, and divinely qualified to act as a stationary witness for God to the world, the Jewish church is called on in the text to appear in this its official capacity, and the idolatrous nations are summoned to Judea to receive its testimony. Ages had elapsed since that church had been called into existence, but still the worship of idols prevailed. Now, therefore, God is sublimely represented as determined to bring the great question to a close; his voice is heard issuing his mandate to all the nations of the earth—to all the idols and their votaries—to appear in Judea; and then calling forth the Israelites to give evidence in his behalf. "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have

ears—the senseless idolators; let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: what god among them can shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified; or, if they cannot do it, let them hear me, and acknowledge that what I say is truth. Ye people of Israel are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I, even I, am God, and besides me there is no Saviour."

As if the Almighty had said—"It is high time to bring this great controversy to a final decision: let all my rivals come." And we are to suppose them assembling: Moloch, "besmeared with infant blood," and all the cruel gods of the Ammonites; Rimmon, Ashtaroth, and all the licentious idols of Syria; Baal, Dagon, Tammuz, and all the false deities of Phœnicia; Apis, and all the monster-deities of Egypt. "Let them come from their fabled resorts in Ida, from the heights of Olympus, from the shrines of Delphos and Dodona—from their temples, groves, and hells—the whole pantheon—the thirty thousand gods of heathen mythology, with all their retinue of priests and worshippers. And now," saith Jehovah, "having assembled, let them produce their witnesses to justify their conduct in receiving worship; and for this end, let them prove that one of their pretended prophecies was ever fulfilled. I am content to rest my claims on that single proof. Are they silent? Then let my witnesses stand forth: let the nation of Israel appear. Descendants of the patriarchs, children of the prophets, ye are my witnesses. Testify in my behalf before this assembled and idolatrous world. Read in their hearing the history of my conduct towards you, from the day that I brought you out of Egypt to the present moment, and they will be constrained to admit the fact of my existence, and the doctrine of my superintending providence. Tell them of all the miracles I have wrought in your behalf—and thus you will be witnesses to my almighty power. Inform them of all your apostacies from me, and rebellions against me, and of the way in which I have borne with and pardoned you—and thus you will be witnesses to my infinite patience. Tell them of all the predictions which I have caused my prophets to utter, and of the literal fulfilment they have received—and thus you will testify to my omniscience. Take them, in solemn procession, to Sinai, and repeat the laws which I there proclaimed when the mountain trembled—and thus you will attest my unspotted holiness and inflexible justice. Conduct them to my temple on Zion, lift up the veil of my sanctuary, let them see for themselves that no image stands in my shrine, no human sacrifice bleeds on my altar, no licentious rites pollute my worship—and thus you will be attesting the unity and spirituality of my essence, the purity and mercifulness of my character. Forget not to assure them that I am no respecter of persons—that there is mercy for them—that, as I live, I will not the death of a sinner. Lead them to the altar of sacrifice, and, as the victim bleeds, say to them: 'Behold, in a type, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' Tell them that to him have all my prophets given witness, and let them hear the glorious things which they have witnessed. Let my servant Isaiah stand forth and declare, that upon that sacrifice I have laid the iniquities of mankind—that he is wounded for their transgressions, bruised for their iniquities—that the chastisement of their peace is upon him, and that with his stripes they may be healed—that he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: for he shall save out of all nations a multitude which no one can number. Thus will you be my witnesses that I am God, and that besides me there is no Saviour."

Now such was the honourable office and the lofty intention of the Jewish church—it was a stationary witness for God to the world; and the sublime scene described in connexion with the text, is only the figurative realization of that idea. Through each successive age of that church, this divine mandate may be said to have been issued to the world, directing it to repair to God's witnesses in Judea. But the world heeded it not. Individuals, indeed, resorted thither from far distant lands; but in all the regions whence they came, idolatry still reigned. The leading nations had, each in succession, come into contact with God's witnesses; but, so far from receiving their testimony, they went on worshipping their idols, and even essayed to enshrine them in the very temple of Jehovah. Even the Jews themselves had lost the high and spiritual import of their own testimony. All things proclaimed that, if the world is to be enlightened and saved through the instrumentality of the church, another church must be set up, and another mode of witnessing be employed.

When the fulness of time was come, the church was set up. You know its heavenly origin, its aggressive constitution, and its early apostolic history—all combining to prove that it was a new thing in the earth, a fresh witness for God. In another, and a nobler, sense than before, God became his own witness. The Son of God, in person, assumed the office. In this capacity he had been predicted—"I have given him," said God, "for a witness to the people." In this capacity he came; and having traversed Judea in every direction, and found it hemmed in on all sides by the grossest idolatry—having found that he could nowhere step over its frontiers without entering the territory of an idol-god—having taken an ample survey of the world—what was his estimate of its moral condition? He lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said—for he found that he could obtain no fit audience on earth—"O, righteous Father, the world hath not known thee!" And what, under these circumstances, was the course which he pursued? "To this end was I born," said he, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth"—to the full manifestation of God. And, accordingly, his acts demonstrated the existence of God—his humanity embodied the spirituality of God—his character illustrated the perfections of God. He was the true "tabernacle of witness." The glorious train of the divine perfections came down and filled the temple of his humanity. God was manifest in the flesh. His character left no attribute of the divine nature unillustrated—his teaching left no part of the divine will unrevealed—his kindness left no fear in the human heart unsoothed—his meritorious death left no amount of human guilt unatoned for. Wherever he went, and wherever he was employed, he was still winning for himself that title which he wears in heaven: "The Faithful and True Witness." But, chiefly, Calvary was the place of testimony. There, when he could say no more for God, he bade the cross begin to speak. There, when his lips had uttered their testimony, he opened his heart, and spake in blood. There was the summing up of all the promises, and of all the character of God: and the total was—universal and infinite love.

And now, if his first object had been thus to witness for God, his second was to arrange for the boundless diffusion of the testimony. No sooner has he worked out the great truth that God is love, than he provides that the world shall resound with the report. As if he had been sitting on the circle of the heavens, and surveying all the possibilities and events that could occur down to the close of time, he answers the objections to this