

"*RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION.*"

For if, in this verse, St. Paul bids us play the citizen worthily, how can we more worthily be citizens—the truest citizens of our country, because the best citizens of heaven—than by preaching that moral inflexibility which constitutes not only the true prosperity of nations, but their very continuance? Will must he read the lessons of history who fails to see what it is that

"Ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat;"

and that it is the retribution of their own guilt—"good measure, shaken down, and pressed together, and running over, given into their bosoms." You know what a glorious nation the Greeks were—how brave, how beautiful, how richly endowed with sensibility and genius; yet how brief was their day of power! The immortal glory which they won at Marathon was lost, not two generations afterward, at *Agospotami*; and when the news of that terrible naval defeat of a power that claimed absolute naval supremacy was brought to the *Piræus*, the heathen historian tells us how a wail of agony ran along the long walls into the city; and how in the city not one man slept that night; and how their anguish was intensified by the remorseful thought of the cruelties which they had inflicted on the little island of *Melos* and the brave defenders of *Torone* and *Scione*. And you know what the iron empire of Rome was, and how it bestrode the narrow world like a colossus. Why, then, did the little stone of Christianity which smote it break it into pieces, and winnow its fragments like the chaff of the summer threshing floor? Was it not because the avenging angels which punish cruelty and lust had recorded that prophecy which our poet puts into the lips of the injured British queen?

"Rome shall perish! Write that word
In the blood which she has spilt;
Perish hopeless and abhorred,
Deep in ruin as in guilt!"

And what made the power of the *Popedom* perish? The Popes, in virtue partly of audacious and ignorant distortions of one or two Scripture texts, had made princes hold their stirrups and put their haughty feet on the necks of emperors. But was it not proved that "vaulting ambition overleaps itself" when *Boniface VIII.*, the haughtiest of them all, he who in the bull "*Unam Sanctam*" had spoken such great, swelling words of vanity, in the hour of his deserved humiliation, received on his cheeks the blow of the French soldier whose ancestors the Papacy had burnt? And what was it but avarice which prevented Spain from holding the empire of both hemispheres after the days of *Charles V.*? And what was it but scepticism and immorality which made France collapse the other day into utter ruin before the Germans? Is it I who say it? It is her own sons who say it; not humble believers and saintly Catholics only, but men of the world and unbelievers. In more than one book, written at that time, they admitted that her religion had become a goddess materialism; her practice, a calculated sensuality; her literature, a cynical journalism, which sneered at every virtue, and a leprous fiction, which disseminated every vice. She trusted in her armies, her numbers, her prestige, the *elan* of her soldiers, the criticism of her journalists, the vapouring patriotism of her boulevards; in a word, she trusted in anything and everything, in that day, save in God and right! And what came of it? Her magnificence melted away like a vision of the *Apocalypse*; her unfortunate emperor became a despised and broken idol; like the corpse of some exhumed king, her strength slipped into ashes at a touch! Well, then, since the welfare of nations depends in no small degree on the actions of priests and the words of prophets, I say that—not, it may be, often with party politics (unless it be to purify them from their falsehoods and corruptions, their rancours and selfishness, their timid hunting after popularity and catching at votes), but often with national politics, in their highest sense—it is the duty of the clergy to blow the trumpet in Israel, and to see that it gives no uncertain sound.

And if they do so worthily, if they do so in the true spirit of Christ's ambassadors, what blessings may

they perpetuate, what horrors may they avert! Let me speak no longer in the abstract, but shew you by concrete examples what I mean. Let me tear two pages, for your perusal, out of the recent history of England. Let me mention two conspicuous instances, which, if we do our duty, ought, to our eternal blessedness, to be the types and precedents of many more. One is in the recollection of most of us here, and I can mention it with the more propriety because, if it was inaugurated by Liberals, one of the chief commissioners who helped to carry it out was an eminent Conservative, so that both parties may claim a share in this pure glory. You all remember the cotton famine of 1862—the sore distress it caused; the heroic endurance of the operatives; the noble generosity of the wealthy; the yet nobler charity which made the ill-paid labourers of the south deny themselves to aid the suffering factory hands of the north; the brotherhood of race which made the American people, although irritated, as they were, by the countenance given to the Southern States, send large relief to our starving population. At that time a ship named the "*Alabama*," built by a private English owner, escaped from the *Mersey* and did terrible damage to the shipping and commerce of the United States. The American Government held us guilty of culpable remissness. Our own Government thought we had done our best, and that no international law had been broken. At that time the United States were not in a condition to take any steps; but the anger smouldered, and when, in 1865, the struggle was over and cotton could again be freely imported, the bitterness of their feelings still remained like a dark cloud on the horizon. A vote to break off all national intercourse was actually proposed in the American Senate. Imagine how extreme would have been the horrors, how incalculable the disasters, if the smouldering fuel of anger between two such nations as England and America had burst into the blaze of war! Happily for us, happily for all mankind, nobler, wiser, more Christian views prevailed. In 1872 it was proposed in the Treaty of Washington to settle the question between the two governments by arbitration, and so to establish a precedent applicable to all future disputes between civilized nations. That treaty was facilitated by an unreserved expression of regret on our part for the ravages of these privateers. The terms were arranged; the arbitrators met; the decision was against us; £3,000,000 were awarded in satisfaction of all claims; we bowed to the decision, and at once, without a murmur, paid that vast sum down. In the same year the disputed island of *San Juan* was also awarded to the United States, by the arbitration of the Emperor of Germany; and these two claims, which a few years back would have led to bloody and fratricidal wars, and would have deluged whole pages of our history in blood, were decided by impartial tribunals, whose award involved no humiliation or disgrace. Never, my brethren, had the sun of England shone with a purer glory. Never since *Crinan* was, had nations taken a nobler step to remove the unutterable horror and guilt of internecine war. Never was it more conspicuously shewn that, not only without dishonour, but consistently with the most chivalrous courage and the loftiest glory; not only without disaster, but with the most permanent benefit, Christian nations, like Christian men, might regulate their intercourse in accordance with His Sermon on the Mount, whom all Christians profess to worship as their Saviour and their Lord. If war at the very best be fruitful always of ruin and of horror; if the most successful war be only, as the greatest of living generals has said, "a splendid misery;" if charity and righteousness be better, at all times, than blood and fire; can the clergy have a nobler function in Christian politics than the promotion of His teachings who said "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God?"

Let me take one more instance. In these days we are all agreed as to the unchristian, inhuman, indefensible shame and wickedness of the traffic in flesh and blood. But it was not always so. A hundred years ago those who demanded the abolition of the

slave trade were called "*Jacobins*," "*exaggerating fanatics*," "*intemperate Pharisees*." Slavery was regarded as a good old custom, consecrated by the wisdom of our ancestors. *George III.* threatened the Governor of Virginia with his highest displeasure if he did anything to obstruct the importation of slaves. *Boswell* said that the abolition of the slave trade would be "robbery of the masters, cruelty to the savages, and to shut the gates of mercy on mankind." The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel derived part of its income from slaves. *George Whitefield* reckoned slaves, after carts and horses, in the schedule of the property of his orphanage in Georgia. *John Newton* said that he had never had such heavenly hours as when he was a slave-driver in Cuba. Scripture was regarded as a stronghold of the defence of slavery, so that a man could only be an infidel if he disapproved of it. By one of those grotesque misapplications of ignorance which still pass current on the interpretation of Scripture, God was supposed to have ordained slavery because *Ham* behaved wickedly to his drunken father. Had Christianity condemned slavery? Had not St. Paul sent back a runaway slave? Thus, as he has done in every age and as he does very largely in this age, "the devil quoted Scripture for his purpose." Thus:

"What damned error, but some sober brow
Will bless it and approve it with a text,
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?"

What was there in England to meet all these combined forces of wealth, of custom, of power, of vested interests, of the perverted opinion of good men, of Scripture argument and Scripture precedent? There was nothing but the unclouded moral sense of a few brave men; the moral indignation, which in some minds no ashes of custom could quench; the moral insight, which was not to be obfuscated by sophistries, or blinded by gross perversions of the sacred letter to purposes which violate the conscience of mankind. In 1785 a Cambridge undergraduate, named *Clarkson*, had gained a prize by an essay on what was then regarded as an open question: "Is it lawful to enslave people against their will?" As he rode back from Cambridge to London, the subject haunted his mind. If it was wrong, why was it done? He got off his horse to think, and his thoughts ended in this conclusion: If the slave trade is wrong, it must be put down. He devoted his life to the task. In 1807, twenty-two years afterward, the slave trade was abolished. In 1833, forty-eight years afterward, emancipation was carried. The struggle is deeply worthy of your study. If you are to obey the command of St. Paul in this text, and to play the part of citizens worthily of the Gospel of Christ, you can find no event so full of instruction. It will furnish you with an immortal model for the true lines of Christian statesmanship. It will furnish you with a glorious incentive to courage in the battle for righteousness. It will inspire you to seek only that applause which, though it may take the form of bitter obloquy for a time, always in the long run awaits on the pursuit of noble ends by noble means. It will teach you that eternal principles need only a few true champions to insure their triumph over national apostacies.

My brethren, in this Abbey, where the very stones should cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber could answer it in the cause of charity and righteousness, read these lessons on the tombs of those who took part in that great struggle. Read on the tomb of *Zachary Macaulay*, by the western door, how through a protracted life, "with an intense but quiet perseverance which no success could relax, no reverse subdue, no toil or persecution or reproach could daunt, he devoted his time, talents, fortune, and all the energies of his mind and body to the service of the most helpless of mankind." Read on the tomb of *Granville Sharpe*, in the south transept, how he aimed "to rescue his native country from the guilt of employing the arm of freedom to rivet the fetters of bondage," and was "one of the honourable band associated to deliver Africa from the rapacity of Europe." You see "guilt" is the term applied to the slave trade, as *Livingstone*, on his tomb at your feet, called it "the open sore of the world." Yet only half a century before the slave