

Comfort for England.

BY THE REV. JOHN WATSON.

The subject of sermon is Comfort for England, and you will find the text in the first verse of the fortieth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." I will make one little change in the translation, taking the words of Dr. George Adam Smith:—"Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem." "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of England, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished."

Had the Hebrew prophets no other claim upon our regard, we ought to hold them in everlasting

RESPECT FOR THEIR PATRIOTISM.

Israel was their people, and for Israel a prophet thought that a man might well lay down his life and die. Israel was also God's people; the strength of Israel in every time of trouble was the Lord of Hosts. According to the prophetic idea, the nation had been separated from other peoples, and safeguarded round about, and trained in an especial manner, and made the instrument of divine will; and the prophets' interest was not confined to the sacrifices of the temple nor to coteries of pious people, but swept into its heart everything that concerned the welfare of the community. Why should not our faith go further afield and have a more generous range, and we also carry in our heart, not only as citizens, but also as Christians, this England which God gave to our fathers, and has continued in its glory unto their children? Why should we not take our courage in both our hands, and, looking at the history of the past and comparing it with the history of the present, recognise in our own people the mother of Israel, called of God in a special manner, set apart of God for a special mission, and gather unto our soul all the great promises of God and also make our boast in him as the prophets did? This, as I take it, was the high note of patriotism in the writer of "Piers Plowman"; in Wiclif, that reformer before the Reformation; in Latimer, with his shrewd English speech and popular sympathies; in Sir Thomas More, too, that public soul; in Cromwell, our chief of men; in that eminent servant of God whose life and labors, whose glorious and triumphant death you celebrate to-day; in Thomas Carlyle also, and in John Ruskin. These men carried the sins of England on their conscience, they felt the sorrows of England in their hearts, they dared to believe that God was the God of England in as true a sense as he was the God of the twelve tribes and the two tribes of Israel; and England was as dear to them and other men of the same prophetic spirit that I could mention as ever Israel and Judah were dear to Amos and Isaiah.

What did the Hebrew prophets depend on for this great conception that God had called the nation and had great work for the nation to do? They depended on

THE FACTS OF HISTORY

behind them, which created in their souls an irresistible conviction; and I ask you whether the right arm of the Most High has not been as conspicuous in English history? From what perils in past centuries has he not delivered this country when the whole world was against us and was put to confusion? Had not God helped us in the sixteenth century, then there had been no English nation to-day; had he not helped us at the beginning of this century, ah, then England had been a province of France. Is it not a provincialism of faith, and is it not a form of unbelief, that will find God in the quarrels of the Judges, and not find him in the battles of the Peninsular War? Pitt and Wellington were as distinctly servants of God in history as Jephthah and Samson; and if those old merciless fighters of the Judges did a great service to civilization and righteousness in Europe and in the world. Yes, and if we admire the Hebrew poets who celebrated the glory of their little country streams and its hills, its woods and its plains, from Dan to Beersheba, should we not also pay tribute to the poets God has given us when they rouse our spirit, and when they magnify this green and beautiful country which God has made our heritage? You say that Israel had a special mission; and is any man's eye so blind that he cannot see the mission of England? Have not we been surrounded by the seas and our national character formed for purposes that we can recognize? What nation has ever planted so many colonies, explored so many unknown lands, made such practical contributions to civilization, set such an illustrious example of liberty? Within our blood is the genius of government, the passion for justice, the love of adventure, and the intelligence of pure faith. Of the Jewish stock came our Lord, and therefore that people must have a lonely place; but when it comes to carrying out those great blessings, physical, political, social, and religious which have been conferred upon the world by the Cross and pierced hand of the Lord, I challenge any one to say whether any nation has so extended them within her own borders, or been so willing to give them to the ends of the earth, as God's England.

I do not, when I strike so high a note, forget ENGLAND'S SINS; for against the Eternal we have sinned and in our own

generation by inordinate love of material possessions, by discord between the classes of the commonwealth, by a certain insolence which has offended foreign peoples, and also by hideous sins of the flesh. Our sins have been great, and it becomes us to acknowledge them, as I hope during this winter we have been acknowledging them, with broken and contrite hearts. Does our sin destroy our calling? Does our sin break the covenant which the Eternal made with our fathers? No people ever sinned against God like Israel, for there was no commandment they did not break, there was no insult to the Eternal which they did not offer; and I declare that between the sin of Israel and the sin of England, God's two chosen peoples of ancient and modern times, there has been the similarity which arises from the sins of people in the same position. Both boasted themselves overmuch against other peoples, both were intoxicated with prosperity, both depended upon themselves instead of utilizing and consecrating the favour of the Most High. When we desire to confess our sins, where do we go? We go to the confessions of the Hebrew prophets. And when we ask mercy for our sins, what are the promises we plead? The great promises of mercy declared by the evangelical prophets, and now sealed by the death and life and resurrection of our Lord. If God broke not the covenant he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob till he had accomplished all things which he had promised to do for his people, and they are not yet accomplished, neither will he break, neither has he broken the covenant with our fathers, and to which we also have set our hands. Because the Hebrew prophet believed that his people were God's people, he had the courage to speak plainly to them. Brethren, he is not a traitor to his country who on occasion points out his country's sins; he is not a friend of his country's enemy who calls his country to repentance. He is the traitor who, placed in any position of influence, either in the senate or in the pulpit, will not point out the errors of his nation; for it is he against whom the charge will be made that he hath healed the hurt of the daughter of his people slightly. When Israel sinned there was no voice so stern as that of Isaiah or Amos; but they delighted not in the work any more than their God delighted in judgment. If God sent them the rod, they took the rod and they gave the stroke, but the stroke fell also on the prophet's own heart, and he suffered most of all the people. When the people repented and turned again to God, when they brought forth works meet for repentance and showed humility, ah, there was no man so glad as the prophet, there was none whose feet were so beautiful upon the mountains, bringing the gospel of peace. He that rebuked then lifted up, he that had stricken bound up the wounds. When the prophet takes up the work of consolation he has no bound, he makes the comfort of God to run down the streets like a river; it is not enough to say it once, but twice must he say it, till, like the news that spread through London yesterday, so the comfort of God shall run like lightning throughout Jerusalem. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." Yes, and when he takes to comforting, he is not to be bound by theology or arguments of the schools; he is not going to ask questions whether a man can expiate his sins or whether a nation can win repentance; he flings all these kind of arguments to the winds; for he has come out from the presence of the Eternal, who doesn't keep accounts like that, and he cries, "Speak ye home to Jerusalem; her warfare is accomplished."

He said more than that. This man declares that

GOD HATH NOW REPENTED.

It was his people repented first; now he is repenting. They repented of their sins; behold, God has begun to repent of his judgment. I have—he makes the eternal say—I have been over-hard with this people, and I have punished them more than they deserve; go and comfort them, comfort them doubly, give it out with a lavish hand; they have received double for all their sins. Brethren, when the prophet speaks in this fashion he is not referring to material prosperity, for the words were spoken to the exiles in Babylon; and when I am speaking here today and in this place of such sacred associations, I am not directly or specially alluding to the great victories which God has been pleased to crown the cause that we believe to be the cause of liberty and of righteousness. No, the prophet was speaking of a blessing greater than any material prosperity, and he comforted the exiles there, not because they were victorious—their day had not come—but because they had repented and been reconciled unto God. The comfort I preach today is not based on arms; it is based on this, I take—I am sure I am right—on the nobler spirit which God has given England during the progress of this war. We sinned, and according to our sin was our punishment; we have repented, I declare it without doubt, through our churches and through our homes, and individually we have laid the lessons of the Eternal to heart; we have repented, and according to our repentance shall be the blessing of God. Did we boast overmuch last autumn? Ah me, the boasts have been paid twofold in the blood of brave men and in the humiliation of our fame. We send out our soldiers now with a steadfaster heart and in a far nobler spirit. On every hand are the signs of repent-

ance. We have had great reverses, but I ask you whether England ever lost heart? Never; we have not said we were betrayed, we have not turned and rent our rulers, we have not called home generals who were doing their best, and broke their hearts. No, and we are not going for mercy to any quarter; and if other nations had joined in we would have asked no mercy, but the first sight of a European nation joining in against us would have made us one man from John o' Groats house to Cornwall. We know that no man is master of circumstances, we know the ablest man may fail; and what we are grateful for is what the Romans in their best days were grateful for when they went out and met a beaten general, and said, "We honor you because you did not despair of the commonwealth." Thank God, the unbroken tradition of our generals and statesmen is honored, and that has been fulfilled through the whole of this trouble. I do not say we are a wise people—there are foolish people in a large nation; I do not say there have not been peevish complaints, shrill, high-pitched, shrieking voices; I do not say there have not been ungenerous criticisms; but I do say that all that has been but the spew on the surface of the water, and that throughout our homes—and a minister knows the homes of a people, and the tone of the homes is more than the cries of agitators—through the homes of our people there never has been a nobler spirit, more unboasting courage, more unflinching confidence in God. And therefore, with that before me, I say, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye home today to the hearts of England."

There were many of us who were afraid—and we had some reason—that the fever of gold, so dangerous a snare for every people, had something to do with the beginning of this war; and against that some of us lifted our voices, and if it is ever again to complicate and disgrace our policy, we shall lift our voices with yet greater intensity. That is a question on which people differ, and I am not going farther into it; but I say with confidence now, that whatever was the genesis of this war, it is

NOT FOR GOLD THAT ENGLAND IS FIGHTING TODAY.

No; when England rises in a body all such intriguers or speculators disappear, and England rose and England fights today for that which has been dear to her from the Commonwealth downwards—for liberty, for righteousness, for equal rights between man and man, for lasting peace in a fair province of God's world, and for the ancient unstained glory of the English name. "Wherefore, comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye home to the heart of England."

Some of us were also afraid in past years that our people, through their great commercial prosperity and through certain social influences, were growing soft and losing their moral fibre, and some of us considered that nothing would so cleanse the nation as a great war. We dare not pray for such a thing; for, ah me, the widows and the orphans; but we felt if a war should come, it would cleanse England. And the war has come, and now the mass of our people are coming out of the furnace strong and refined. Has our army ever stood higher in bravery, in patience, in confidence, than today?—from that old man that went out stricken in his own heart, and at the age of seventy led the armies of England to victory, down to the laddie who would be in the front line of fire, and when one arm was disabled shifted the bugle to the other hand and blew till he fell. Did you ever expect to see the day—I did not—when from homes of affluence at the West End and from humble homes at the East End, from the cities and from country cottages, young men, uncompelled, would arise and go forward, counting all things but loss for their country's sake? When the prize has to be awarded—the prize of popular esteem and honor—it can go neither to the castle nor can it go to the cottage: it must be divided between them both, for the princes of Israel and the people thereof have gone willingly to the death for their country's sake. If the prize is to be given to any person in especial, it must be given to

THE WOMEN OF ENGLAND.

For I know what I speak of, having men going up from my own people; and wives have given their husbands and mothers their sons without complaining, for England's sake. You may find complaints in public newspapers here and there, not many; you hear none from the women who are making the largest sacrifices. It was only last week, travelling in a railway train, I found in the carriage a reservist's wife and the mother of two reservists, most respectable, nice people, whose husband and sons had been called out from happy and prosperous homes; and they spoke about the war. Did they complain? No; they read letters from the husband and sons, and they quarrelled as to which had the best general, who would be first at Pretoria. It did an Englishman's heart good to be in the carriage and to see the spirit of our people. Yes, and in the great homes, where men who are heirs to ancient names and great fortunes, have gone out, there is no complaint; no, and in the little homes there is no complaint, where the wife will read a letter from her husband at the front, not very grammatically composed, but there are better things than grammar, and not very eloquent if you please, but eloquence of mere words is a poor business, but powerful

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The Pastor of Ber

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