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DISCOURSES TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS. BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

DISCOURSE VI.

GOD'S WILL THE END OF LIFE.

I am going to ask you a question, my dear brethren, so trite, and therefore so uninteresting at first sight, that you may wonder why I put it, and may object that it will be difficult to fix the mind on it, and may anticipate that nothing profitable can be made of it. It is this:—“Why were you sent into the world?” Yet, after all, it is perhaps a thought more obvious than it is common, more easy than it is familiar; I mean, it ought to come into your minds, but it does not, you never had more than a distant acquaintance with it, though that sort of acquaintance you have had with it for many years. Nay, once or twice perhaps you have been thrown across it somewhat intimately, for a short season; but this was an accident which did not last. There are those who recollect the first time, as it would seem, when it came home to them. They were but little children, and they were by themselves, and they spontaneously asked themselves, or rather God spake in them, “Why am I here? how came I here? who brought me here? what am I to do here?” Perhaps it was the first act of reason, the beginning of their real responsibility, the commencement of their trial; perhaps from that day they may date their capacity, their awful power, of choosing between good and evil, and of committing mortal sin. And so, as life goes on, the thought comes vividly, from time to time, for a short season across the conscience; whether in illness, or in some anxiety, or some season of solitude, or on hearing some preacher, or reading some religious work. A vivid feeling comes over them of the vanity and unprofitableness of the world, and then the question recurs, “Why then am I sent into it?”

And a great contrast indeed does this vain, unprofitable, yet overbearing world, present with such a question as that. It seems out of place to ask such a question in so magnificent, so imposing a presence, as that of the great Babylon. The world professes to supply all that we need, as if we were sent into it for the sake of being sent, and for nothing beyond the sending. It is a great favor to have an introduction to this august world. This is to be our exposition, forsooth, of the mystery of life. Every man is doing his own will here, seeking his own pleasure, pursuing his own ends, and that is why he was brought into existence. Go abroad into the streets of the populous city, contemplate the continuous outpouring there of human energy, and the countless varieties of human character, and be satisfied. The ways are thronged, carriage-way and pavement; multitudes are hurrying to and fro, each on his own errand, or are loitering about from listlessness or from want of work, or have come forth into the public concourse, to see and to be seen, for amusement, or for display, or on the excuse of business. The carriages of the wealthy mingle with the slow wains laden with provisions, or merchandise, the productions of art or the demands of luxury. The streets are lined with shops, open and gay, inviting customers, and widen now and then into some spacious square or place, with lofty masses of brick-work or of stone, gleaming in the fitful sunbeam, and surrounded or fronted with what stimulates a garden's foliage. Follow them in another direction, and you find the whole groundstead covered with the large buildings, planted thickly up and down, the homes of the mechanical arts. The air is filled below, with a ceaseless, importunate, monotonous din, which penetrates even to your innermost chamber, and rings in your ear, even when you are not conscious of it; and overhead, with a canopy of smoke, shrouding God's day from the realms of obstinate sullen toil. This is the end of man! Or stay at home, and take up one of those daily prints, which are so true a picture of the world; look down the columns of advertisements, and you will see the catalogues of pursuits, projects, aims, amusements, indulgences, what occupy the mind of man. He plays many parts; here he has goods to sell, there he wants employment; there again he seeks to borrow money, here he offers you houses, great seats, or small tenements; he has food for the million, and luxuries for the wealthy, and sovereign medicines for the credulous, and books, new and cheap, for the inquisitive. Pass on to the news of the day, and you will learn what great men are doing at home and abroad; you will read of wars and rumors of wars; of debates in the Legislature, of rising men, and old statesmen going off the scene; of political contests in this city or that county; of the

collision of rival interests. You will read of the money market, and the provision market, and the markets for metals; of the state of trade, the call for manufactures, news of ships arrived in port, of accidents at sea, of exports and imports, of gains and losses, of frauds and their detection. Go forward, and you arrive at discoveries in art and science, discoveries (so called) in religion, the court and royalty, the entertainments of the great, places of amusement, strange trials, offences, accidents, escapes, exploits, experiments, contests, ventures. O this curious, restless, clamorous, panting being, which we call life!—and is there to be no end to all this? is there no object in it? It never has an end, it is its own object!—And now, once more, my brethren, put aside what you see and what you read of the world, and try to penetrate into the hearts, and to reach the ideas and the feelings of those who constitute it; look into them as nearly as you can; enter into their houses and private rooms; strike at random through the streets and lanes, take as they come, palace and novel, office and factory, and what will you find! Listen to their words, witness, alas! their deeds; you will find in the main the same lawless thoughts, the same unrestrained desires, the same ungoverned passions, the same earthly opinions, the same wilful deeds, in high and low, learned and unlearned; you will find them all to be living for the sake of living; they one and all seem to tell you, “We are our own centre, our own end.” Why are they toiling? why are they scheming? for what are they living? We live to please ourselves; life is worthless except we have our own way; we are not sent here at all, but we find ourselves here, and we are but slaves unless we can think what we will, believe what we will, love what we will, hate what we will, do what we will. We detest interference on the part of God or man. We do not bargain to be rich or to be great; but we do bargain, whether rich or poor, high or low, to live for ourselves, to live for the lust of the moment, or according to the doctrine of the hour, thinking of the future and the unseen just as much or as little as we please.

O, my brethren, is it not a shocking thought, but who can deny its truth? The multitude of men are living without any aim beyond this visible scene; they may from time to time use religious words, or they may profess a communion or a worship, as a matter of course or of necessity, but if there was any sincerity in such profession, the course of the world could not run as it does. What a contrast to the end of life, as it is set before us in our most holy Faith! If there was one among the sons of men, who might allowably have taken His pleasure, and have done His own will here below, surely it was He, who came down on earth from the bosom of the Father, and who was so pure and spotless in that human nature which He put on Him, that He could have no human wish or aim inconsistent with the will of His Father. Yet He, the Son of God, the Eternal Word, came, not to do His own will, but His who sent Him, as you know very well is told us again, and again in Scripture. Thus the Prophet in the Psalter, speaking in His person, says, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” And He says in the Prophet Isaiah, “The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I do not withstand Him, I turned not back.” And in the Gospel, when He had come on earth, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.” Hence too in His agony He cried out, “Not My will, but Thine be done.” and St. Paul, in like manner, says, that “Christ pleased not Himself;” and elsewhere, that “though He was God's Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.” Surely so it was; as being indeed the Eternal Co-equal Son, His will was one and the same with the Father's will, and He had no submission of will to make; but He chose to take on Him affections, feelings, and inclinations proper to man, a will innocent indeed and good, but still a man's will, distinct from God's will; a will, which had it acted simply according to what was pleasing to its nature, would, when pain and toil was to be endured, have held back from an active co-operation with the will of God. But though He took on Himself the nature of man, He took not on Him that selfishness, with which fallen man wraps himself round, but in all things devoted Himself as a ready sacrifice to His Father. He came on earth, not to take His pleasure, not to follow His taste, not for the mere exercise of human affection, but simply to glorify His Father, and to do His will. He came charged with a mission, deputed for a work. He looked not to the right nor to the left, He thought not of Himself; He offered Himself up to God.

Hence it is that He was carried in the womb of a poor woman, who before His birth had two journeys to make, of love and of obedience, to the mountains and to Bethlehem. He was born in a stable, and laid in a manger. He was hurried off to Egypt to sojourn there; then He lived till he was thirty years of age in a poor way, by a rough trade, in a small

house, in a despised town. Then, when he went out to preach, He had not where to lay his head; He wandered up and down the country, as a stranger upon earth. He was driven out into the wilderness, and dwelt among the wild beasts. He endured heat and cold, hunger and weariness, reproach and calumny. His food was coarse bread, and fish from the lake, or depended upon the hospitality of strangers. And as He had already left His Father's greatness on high, and had chosen an earthly home; so again, at that Father's bidding, He gave up the sole solace given Him in this world, and denied Himself His Mother's presence. He parted with her who bore Him; He endured to be strange to her; He endured to call her coldly “woman,” who was His own undefiled one, all beautiful, all gracious, the best creature of His hands, and the sweet nurse of His infancy. He put her aside, as Levi, His type, merited the sacred ministry, by saying to his parents and kinsmen, “I know ye not.” He exemplified in his own person the severe maxim, which He gave to His disciples, “He that loveth mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” In all these many ways He sacrificed every wish of His own; that we might understand, that, if He, the Creator, came into His own world, not for His own pleasure, but to do His Father's will, we too have most surely some work to do, and have seriously to bethink ourselves what the work is.

Yes, so it is; realize it, my brethren;—every one who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, men and women, has a mission, has a work. We are not sent into this world for nothing; we are not born at random; we are not here, that we may go to bed at night, and get up in the morning, toil for our bread, eat and drink, laugh and joke, sin when we have a mind, and reform when we are tired of it, rear a family and die. God sees every one of us; He creates every soul, puts it into the body, one by one, for a purpose. He needs, he deigns to need, every one of us. He has an end for each of us; we are all equal in His sight, and we are placed in our different ranks and stations, not to get what we can out of them for ourselves, but to labor in them for Him. As Christ has His work, we too have ours; as He rejoiced to do His work, we must rejoice in ours also.

St. Paul on one occasion speaks of the world as a scene in a theatre. Consider what is meant by this. You know, actors on a stage are on an equality with each other really, but for the occasion they assume a difference of character, some are high, some are low, some are merry, and some sad. Well, would it not be a simple absurdity in any actor to pride himself on his mock diadem, or his edgeless sword, instead of attending to his part? what, if he did but gaze at himself and his dress? what if he secreted, or turned to his own use, what was valuable about it? Is it not his business, and nothing else, to act his part well? common sense tells us so. Now we are all but actors in this world; we are one and all equal, we shall be judged as equals as soon as life is over; yet, equal and similar in ourselves; each has his special part at present, each has his mission,—not to indulge his passions, not to make money, not to get a name in the world, not to save himself trouble, not to follow his bent, not to be selfish and self-willed, but to do what God puts on him to do.

Look at that poor profligate in the Gospel, look at Dives; do you think he understood that his wealth was to be spent, not on himself, but for the glory of God?—yet for forgetting this, he was lost for ever and ever. I will tell you what he thought, and how he viewed things;—he was a young man, and had succeeded to a good estate, and he determined to enjoy himself. It did not strike him that his wealth had any other use than that of enabling him to take his pleasure. Lazarus lay at his gate; he might have relieved Lazarus; that was God's will; but he managed to put conscience aside, and he persuaded himself he should be a fool, if he did not make the most of this world, while he had the means. So he resolved to have his fill of pleasure; and feasting was to his mind a principal part of it. “He fared sumptuously every day;” every thing belonging to him was in the best style, as men speak; his house, his furniture, his plate of silver and gold; his attendants, his establishments. Every thing was for enjoyment, and for show too; to attract the eyes of the world, and to gain the applause and admiration of his equals, who were the companions of his sins. These companions were doubtless such as became a young man of such pretension; they were fashionable men; a collection of refined, high-bred, haughty youths; eating, not gluttonously, but what was rare and costly; delicate, exact, fastidious in their taste, from their very habits of indulgence; not eating for the sake of eating; or drinking for the sake of drinking, but making a sort of science of their sensuality; sensual, carnal, as flesh and blood came, with eyes, ears, tongue, steeped in impurity; every thought, look, and sense, witnessing or

ministering to the evil one who ruled them; yet, with exquisite correctness of idea and judgment, laying down rules for sinning;—heartless and selfish, high, punctilious, and disdainful in their outward deportment, and shrinking from Lazarus, who lay at the gate as an eye-sore, who ought for the sake of decency to be put out of the way. Dives was one of them, and so he lived his short span, thinking of nothing, loving nothing, but himself, till one day he got into a fatal quarrel with one of his godless associates, or he caught some bad illness; and then he lay helpless on his bed of pain, cursing fortune and his physician, that he was no better, and impatient that he was thus kept from enjoying his youth, trying to fancy himself mending when he was getting worse, and disgusted at those who would not throw him some word of comfort in his suspense, and turning more resolutely from his Creator in proportion to his suffering;—and then at last his day came, and he died, and (O miserable!) was buried in hell. And so ended he and his mission.

This was the fate of your pattern and idol; O ye, if any of you be present, young men, who though not possessed of wealth and rank, yet affect the fashions of those who have them. You, my brethren, have not been born splendidly, or nobly; you have not been brought up in the seats of liberal education; you have no high connexions; you have not learned the manners nor caught the tone of good society, you have no share of the largeness of mind, the candor, the romantic sense of honor, the correctness of taste, the consideration for others, and the gentleness, which the world puts forth as its highest type of excellence; you have not come near the courts or the mansions of the great; yet you ape the sin of Dives, while you are strangers to his refinement. You think it the sign of a gentleman to set yourselves above religion, to criticize the religious and professors of religion, to look at Catholic and Methodist with impartial contempt, to gain a smattering of knowledge on a number of subjects, to dip into a number of frivolous publications, if they are popular, to have read the latest novel, to have heard the singer and seen the actor of the day, to be up to the news, to know the names, and if so be, the persons of public men, to be able to bow to them, to walk up and down the street with your heads on high, and to stare at whatever meets you;—and to say and do worse things, of which these outward extravagancies are but the symbol. And this is what you conceive you have come upon earth for! The Creator made you, it seems, O my children, for this work and office, to be a bad imitation of polished ungodliness, to be a piece of tawdry and faded finery, or a scent which has lost its freshness, and does but offend the sense! O that you could see how absurd and base are such pretences in the eyes of any but yourselves! No calling of life but is honorable; no one is ridiculous who acts suitably to his estate and calling; no one, who has good sense and humility, but may in any station of life, be truly well-bred and refined; but ostentation, affectation, and ambitious efforts are in every station of life, high or low, nothing but vulgarities. Put them aside, despise them yourselves, O my very dear sons, whom I love, and whom I would fain serve; O that you could feel that you have souls! O that, before it is too late, you would betake yourselves to Him who is the Source of all that is truly high and magnificent and beautiful, all that is bright and pleasant, and secure what you ignorantly seek, in Him whom you so wilfully, so awfully despise!

He alone, the Son of God, “the brightness of the Eternal Light, and the spotless mirror of His Majesty,” is the Source of all good and all happiness to rich and poor, high and low. If you were ever so high, you would need Him; if you were ever so low, you could offend Him. The poor can offend Him; the poor man can neglect his divinely appointed mission, as well as the rich. Do not suppose, my brethren, that what I have said against the upper or middle class, does not also lie against you, provided you are poor. Though a man were as poor as Lazarus, he could be as guilty as Dives. If you will degrade yourselves to the brutes of the field, who have no reason and no conscience, you need not wealth or rank to do so. Brutes have no wealth; they have no pride of life; they have no purple and fine linen, no splendid table, no retinue of servants, in order to be brutes. They are brutes by the law of their nature; they are the poorest among the poor; there is not a vagrant and outcast who is so poor as they; they differ from him, not in their possessions, but in their want of a soul, in that he has a mission and they have not, he can sin and they can not. O my brethren, it stands to reason, a man may intoxicate himself with a cheap draught, as well as with a costly one; he may steal another's money for his appetites, if he does not waste his own upon them; he may break through the natural and social laws which encircle him, and profane the sanctity of family duties, though he be not a child of nobles, but a peasant, or artisan,—nay, and per-