

RETURN OF THE ARK.

[Perth, February 1844.]

1 Chronicles XV.

ALL the priests chosen to bring up the ark to the city of David were commanded to sanctify themselves. “For,” said David to the priests, “because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order.” Experience had taught David. Sad when it does not teach us, yet seldom does it teach presumptuous men. David had got the sanctified use of the breaking forth of God’s anger upon Uzza. We find also in this account of the ark’s return, that many persons were appointed to the giving of thanks. Surely the approach of the King of saints ought to be welcomed by the highest praises of all creatures; yet how cold and lifeless are we in this matter! All the details here given set forth typically the variety of the praises, which the children of God owe to Him, for His varied dealings towards each. And there is a great variety in these. Some can tell of dealings which others cannot comprehend; and, oh! what some souls have to praise Him for. How loud will be their song to Him who liveth for ever and ever! What notes some will reach! How high their strains!

The form of praise was not left to chance. David delivered the psalm to Asaph with his own hand. It was the spontaneous effusion of that hour, directed by the putting forth of the Holy Ghost, and thus David was full of joy as he approached the resting-place of the ark. He was clothed in a robe of fine linen, which is emblematical of the glorified state of Christ’s church, for she is clothed as in fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints. And, then, filled with the Spirit, he came forth leaping for joy. This is a state in which the Lord’s people can get and need expect no sympathy from the world. None but those who have some acquaintance with the Lord,—the source of all their gladness,—will be able to bear their company when they are in a very lively state, and enabled greatly to rejoice in the Lord. At such times, the world, like Michal, looks down upon them, and is filled with pity and even hatred towards them.

Michal felt, no doubt, the greatest *respect* for David in general; she would, no doubt, idolise him, with the thousands of Israel, when the cry was that he had slain his tens of thousands. But when David was more than usually exalted in the Lord and in the power of His might,—when he could rejoice in Jehovah all the day, and boast in the God of his salvation—the man after God’s own heart,—it was then that Michal (who does not appear to

have been a godly woman, but one with whom David was unequally yoked, being an unbeliever) saw King David dancing and playing; and she despised him in her heart. Oh! how like to what we see now-a-days, and to what has been and will be seen in every age to exist in the hearts of the unregenerate. How perfectly does it express the contempt of the world towards the godly, not at all times, observe, nor indeed at any time, but just when believers are lifted up in soul, and enabled to behold Him “whom their soul loveth.” There is the point at which the enmity of the world begins.

And just as it was not a stranger who mocked David, but Michal, his own wife; so in families we find that this enmity burns hottest of all. This is often quite imperceptible in times of deadness, but not when the Lord appears. Instead of the coming up of the ark into a place, or a congregation, or a family, being a signal for peace, and a cause of union, it is the very reverse. When the ark of the covenant comes up and rests among us (should that blessed and longed-for day ever come), we shall hear of more disunion yet. Union among believers will grow and be strengthened and increase; but *disunion* from unbelievers will increase in proportion. So it is with iron put into a furnace. Someone might put it in, with all the clay about it, to harden it and make the substances *unite*. But this would not be the case. All the metallic part would flow together, and become pure and hardened, but the rest would consume and separate. And where the Lord appears in His glory, congregations are broken up, and churches rent asunder; multitudes are seen standing back in alarm, and *none* are united but the Lord’s true people, while *they* are despised by relatives and acquaintances, those nearest them in the family or in the church, despising them most.

How little have we of His presence now! The want of chastisement is one mark of His absence. Were He among us, there would be more strokes coming direct from the Lord’s hand. There would also be blessings coming direct from His hand upon all; and His own people would be filled with the Spirit, devoted to His glory, triumphing in His praise, and separate from the world. Such a sight as that would quickly bring reproach, mockery, and suffering in its train.

How did David answer the taunt of his wife? “It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight; and of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.” Oh, how beautiful! Few, few have such grace!

Look at the psalm which David composed on the occasion of the coming up of the ark. *He* was not deterred by contempt or ridicule from going on in the praise of the Lord. “Give thanks unto the Lord. . . . Be ye mindful always of his covenant,” going on to show how the Lord had been faithful,

always rebuking their enemies; working, as now He does, wonderful deliverances for His people, when they do not know it; following them from nation to nation; and many times when they think they are deserted by Him, and given over into the hands of their enemies, He is staying the arm of persecution, and saying to their oppressors, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,” while He is reproofing kings for their sakes. And thus, He leads them by His providence, and protects them by His power, till He brings them to His presence in His house above.

If it be so, let His people be continually remembering their Lord, and declaring His goodness to others. Think of the blessedness of being His people. And when you see houses among you where the Lord seems to dwell, should not such sights incite you to strive to get near Him who blesseth them and theirs. Remember, that all are not alike in this matter. There is much left to man’s free-will. The hand of the diligent maketh rich in the things of God, as well as in temporal mercies. Let the Lord’s people resolve, in His strength, that they are to be of the number of those who *make full proof* of the present fruits and privileges of salvation, and they shall not be disappointed.

Are there any such here tonight? any who run the race determinately and fleetly; who pass by, and get out of, and far beyond, the ranks of loiterers and them who are at ease? Are any of you running as if one alone were to obtain the prize? as if the gate of life were too narrow to admit any but *yourself*? Some of us will be taught the necessity for this, by seeing many draw back unto perdition. We might be taught it by Immanuel’s words, “Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Ah! we’ll get our crown taken unless we trample upon ease and sloth, and difficulty, in His name. BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT FEARETH ALWAYS, and who is thus, in continual trembling, led to draw from the fulness of One able to keep him from falling.

Now, may that jealous God, who bringeth down every high thing, and casteth down every proud imagination, by “the power whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself,” *bring us down*, and cast us all into the dust before Him; lest, being lifted up by pride, we touch, with Uzza’s hand, the ark of the covenant; for then Uzza’s judgments will surely break out upon us. Oh! that Jehovah would raise up, for His service in the ministry, men who will go about, taking their lives in their hands, counting not their life dear unto them. Precious, Lord, in Thy sight, is the death of Thy saints; and if it be so, why need they fear? they *cannot* lose life till the time appointed. Oh! for ministers in our beloved land, such as have never yet been seen,—men who will go bound hither and thither, and will go all the more confidently in the Master’s name, even when the Spirit testifieth that “bonds abide them.” Oh! for humbling in the Lord’s sight, because of personal sin,

to be creeping into the dust on account of it, and in view of Thy glory, Lord Jesus. We see not Thy matchless perfections, oh, “Thou fairer than the sons of men,” and yet Thou art ours, “the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely!”