

"BY ME KINGS REIGN."

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A Sermon on the 60th Anniversary of the Queen's Accession.

By the Rev. Dr. Bullinger

Proverbs 8:15: "By Me kings reign."

In few things is it more conspicuously seen that man's thoughts and man's ways are the very opposite of God's than in this.

Man's thought is, that power exists in himself—power for government in temporal things; power for salvation in spiritual things.

Man's "wisdom" culminates here—that the source of all power, and the channel of it too, exists in, and is derived from the people; and that power for salvation exists also in himself.

Now, He who "knows what is in man," has forewarned us of this, and foretold us of it.

When God was about to commit power into the hands of the Gentiles, He took the greatest possible pains (if we may so speak), to impress upon the first recipient of that power (Nebuchadnezzar), and upon us through him, that which Daniel already knew (2:21):—"He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."

To teach Nebuchadnezzar this, He afflicted him, and humbled him for seven years, until He made him a penitent worshipper and a royal preacher; until his throne was turned into a pulpit, and his state-paper into a sermon; and he was made to acknowledge this great truth. Thus the decree went forth, "And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." And thus it came to pass. "And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou?...Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all Whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase" (Dan 4:32,34,35,37).

God would not delegate power in the earth, without making it perfectly clear that He was not parting with it. Therefore, at the very same time He describes this power in its origin, its history, its character, and its end.

And you will notice also that in this Revelation, He shows us that in the case of Power, as with everything else ever entrusted to man, there is a deterioration. Man has ever perverted the best gifts of God!

Man claims indeed that he is ever advancing; political economists and statesmen assure us that progress is everywhere visible, and so it is: but it is a progress ever and everywhere downwards.

This power in the earth began with Gold, but it ends in the mud!

God sees it in its ever-tending, never ceasing, downward course. First, gold; the next stage, silver; the third (which man looks back to as the golden age), brass; and, then came the fourth, iron,—mingled in its later stages with miry clay, until now we have very much more mire than metal.

And as God foretold, so it has been.

Babylon was an absolute monarchy, and as such, God likened it to gold.

Persia was a monarchical government by king and nobles, and God likened it to silver.

Greece was an aristocracy, not of birth, but of intellect, and God likened it to brass.

Rome was at first a democratic Imperialism, and God likened it to iron. In its later stages of to-day, it is divided up into constitutional monarchies, and more republican forms of government, and God likens it to the mire of clay and the brittleness of pottery, which may be mixed up with iron, but can never really combine with it.

And what comes next? Ah! God has not left us in darkness. The next is to be the kingdom of universal power; and, because it is to be the kingdom of Christ, God likens it to a Stone which became a great mountain, and filled all the earth, because it is from the mountain that gold and silver and brass and iron are themselves derived and obtained. He who has "all power committed to Him in heaven and in earth," is presently to take unto Himself His great power and reign, and the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our God, and of His Christ.

All history is but the fulfillment of what Jehovah has foreseen, and provided for, and provided against. Whatever motives may actuate and sway its actors, the counsel of God

shall stand. Let us therefore do our duty, but let us never forget that there is a God in history.

"God" (said St. Paul, when he stood in the capital of the Third Empire), "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing He is Lord of heaven and earth...hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell upon the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."

In these words, we are taught that God is the Supreme Ruler and Over-ruler in history, giving to nations, as well as to individuals, their appointed times and bounds.

To the eye of sense, indeed, God's ways are unnoticed and unknown, but to the eye of faith a divine plan is seen running through the history of the past. With all the distracting events passing before him, the man of God, with the Chart of God's Word in his hand, the "more sure word of prophecy" in his heart, and the "law and the testimony" as "a lamp to his feet and a light to his path"—is enabled to estimate at their real value the tumult of sights and sounds by which he is surrounded.

He knows that his salvation is nearer than when he believed. He sees that empires and kingdoms have faded out from the recollection of the people that have come after; that the place of the mightiest dynasties knows them no more. But "in the volume of the book it was written" for peoples then unborn, so that, to the very ends of the earth, it might be made known that "there is a God in heaven": "He changeth the times and season: He removeth kings and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Dan 2:28,21).

As a nation, dear brethren, we pride ourselves on our wisdom and our understanding; but—Are we not ungratefully putting away from us more and more the remembrance, that our forefathers purchased our liberties for us with their blood?

Have you ever really considered the source of our present liberties? Have you ever reflected, that it was the entrance of God's Word which gave us light, enabled us to understand what true liberty is, and finally broke for us the bonds of tyranny and arbitrary power in which so many nations, ignorant of that blessed Word, still groan without any real hope of deliverance.

Everywhere we see discontent. Good government is the one universal want of the world. The fires of socialistic anarchy are ready to break forth in a vain attempt to secure it. But not so were our liberties gained. Our national freedom has gone hand-in-hand with that freedom wherewith Christ makes His people free. Our liberties are identified with the cause of Protestant Evangelical truth.

Many to-day have much to say concerning the growth of our Empire, the extension of our Colonies, the wonderful advances in Arts and Sciences, discoveries and inventions. We have had 60 years of the drama, 60 years of philanthropy, 60 years of literature, 60 years of everything.

But what about 60 years of Protestantism? Are our liberties more secure than they were 60 years ago? How many of our safe-guards have gone? How many of our bulwarks have been bartered away? How many of our defences have been removed?

Mid-way in these 60 years the service for November 5th was abolished out of deference to man, and out of a false charity to our enemies, we ceased to thank God for His merciful deliverances to our Throne and Church and Nation.

I stop not to speak of the increase of Popery in and out of Church, the decrease of true Evangelical truths.

Its influence is seen even in the very service appointed for use on this day.

Unlike the old service which it supersedes for to-day* there is no reference to enemies, conspiracies and plots. No prayer

"for God's protection of the Queen against all her enemies" in which special petitions to "weaken the hands, blast the designs, and defeat the enterprises of all her enemies, that no secret conspiracies, nor open violences, may disquiet her reign."

* We hope the design to perpetuate the change will be frustrated.

The very service for June 20th has dropped out for some years past, and in very few Prayer-books does it find a place. No wonder the Queen and nation have time after time been subject to secret conspiracies and open violences.

Even in the many proposed new versions of the old National Anthem, whatever may be the merit or demerit of the proposed new verse, all are agreed in omitting the verse which prays:

"Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks."

This is too plain and palpable for the modern false toleration and charity which prevails in our day.*

* We are thankful to note that in compliance, as was generally understood, with Her Majesty's own wish the good old habitual text of "God Save the Queen" was faithfully maintained. In sturdy chorus the well-established verse rang out, of those who be our enemies:

"Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks."

(—*Daily Telegraph*, June 21, 1897)

The voices of the sentimentalists and the counsels of the Jesuits have prevailed.

The observance of these solemn days of thanksgiving was abolished! But is Rome pacified? Is she not as deadly hostile to England and to religious freedom as ever she was?

We may thank God we live to see a revival of the service for the 20th of June—thus publicly acknowledging the truth and teaching of our text. The opening sentence gives it its keynote—(1 Tim 2:1-3), "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men—for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty: for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour."

Thus it is not urged as our duty, but in our own interest; that while we pray for our Sovereign, we at the same time promote the continuance of our liberties.

The command of God to His ancient people is still more explicit (Jer 29:7): "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace." What motive could exist to bind the Jew to a compliance with this command which does not lie with tenfold weight on every subject of our empire?

For in spite of all that there is to deplore, there is much that we may truly praise God for. In offering up to-day our prayers and thanksgivings, we are doing His will, obeying His command as recorded in 1 Timothy 2:1-3 and 1 Peter 2:13-15. And if these exhortations were given when Nero was Emperor, how much more may they be given in our day!

If when Nero was destroyer of the faith, Christians were to submit and pray, how much more when Victoria is defender of the faith!

We have only to reflect on what our position to-day would have been if we had experienced 60 years of Queen Mary instead of Queen Victoria!

This reflection must surely bring even the most exclusive of Christians to his senses, and it exalts our service on to the very highest ground. It ennobles our loyalty to our Sovereign. It

lifts it out of mere political partisanship, sentimental feeling, or servile flattery. It bids us to count up our mercies, national mercies and ecclesiastical privileges, which enable us to worship according to our conscience, without let or hindrance, none daring to make us afraid.

In estimating the cause of all our national mercies and greatness, men dwell on physical peculiarities, military and naval prowess, geographical position, natural resources and products.

But other nations have had these, and have passed away as a dream.

No, these are not causes, they are conditions in which cause works.

The cause is God's blessing, and apart from this, all other things are nothing worth. The world may go on as it will, the "strange children" may utter their lies and "speak vanity," and say that national happiness consists in outward prosperity, but we reply, Nay. "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psa 144).