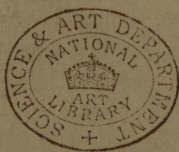


THE
GREAT EXHIBITION,

AN

Opportunity to promote the Glory of God.

BY THE REV. W. CONWAY, M.A.



PRICE THREEPENCE.

GREAT EXHIBITION

Opportunity to promote the cause of God

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, ROCHESTER

BY THE REV. W. CONWAY, M.A.

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ON SUNDAY, MAY 4, 1851.

BY THE REV. W. CONWAY, M.A.,
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GREAT EXHIBITION

1851

THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851

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A SERMON.

DANIEL v. 23.

*“The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose
are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.”*

THE day on which these words were spoken, was memorable, beyond all others, in the history of ancient Babylon, and of Belshazzar, the last king of the old Chaldean empire. Modern discoveries have confirmed the Scripture account of the marvellous resources of the ancient dynasties, which held the dominion over the most civilized parts of the world. In early ages, Asia was the quarter of the globe most renowned for political greatness, for martial enterprise, for the achievements of art, and the records of learning. It was the locality which first became the residence of mankind, after the deluge. It was the inheritance of Shem, the first-born son of Noah, while the descendants of Japheth peopled the continent of

Europe, and Africa became the possession of the children of Ham. Within its limits was included the land of promise, which God gave to his chosen people, Israel—the land where Abraham worshipped, and David sang, and Isaiah prophesied. This was, moreover, the predestinated region in which the stupendous work of Redemption was accomplished. Its favoured soil was marked by the footsteps of the Incarnate Saviour, and moistened by His atoning blood. And hence it is that so much is written in Scripture history concerning that particular quarter of the earth. While Asia was thus the most distinguished part of the globe, in its earlier ages, the Assyrian empire was the most conspicuous amongst its varied nations, and Babylon, its capital, was the wonder of bygone times. To describe its magnificence, it is called in the book of Isaiah, “The golden city,” “The glory of kingdoms, and the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency.” (Is. xiii. 19; xiv. 4.) Everything that was magnificent, luxurious, ornamental, or useful, was collected there in rich abundance. Within its hundred-gated walls, were parks and gardens, palaces and temples, which are celebrated by ancient writers, beyond those of any other city in the world. Here, too, the wise men of the east were congregated, the renowned sages and teachers of that remote generation.

In the royal palace of the illustrious capital of that vast empire, Belshazzar had prepared a banquet for a thousand of his lords. To manifest his insolent contempt for the God of Heaven, he sent for "the golden vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple at Jerusalem;" and the sensual monarch, with his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them to the praise of the idols of Babylon. In the midst of His security and revelry, the king's countenance suddenly fell at the sight of a hand drawing some mysterious characters upon the wall. The Prophet of God, previously despised and neglected by the king, was sent for in this hour of terror and consternation. Then followed Daniel's faithful exposure of Belshazzar's impiety, concluding with the words of the text, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." And in that night Darius took the city by assault; Belshazzar was slain in his own palace; and the kingdom passed to the Medes and Persians. The artifice employed by the conqueror to get possession of the city, by turning the river Euphrates from its former channel, converted the surrounding country into an unhealthy marsh; and, in consequence, the prosperity of the city soon began to decline; till, at last, it was so utterly annihilated,

that it became "a possession for the bittern, and pools of water" (Is. xiv. 23); and the most diligent investigations of many enterprising travellers have as yet failed in determining with certainty even its site.

There is very much of special instruction for us in this narrative of Holy Scripture. In the providence of God, since the Christian era, the tide of civilization has progressed westward; and while Asia has been deprived of its former supremacy in secular dominion and in religious light, Europe has been blessed, in a far higher degree, with spiritual privileges and temporal advantages. The word of prophecy has declared that, subsequently to the destruction of the Roman empire, no single nation shall ever again sway the sceptre of the world: and in strict accordance with Divine revelation, the dominion of the civilized world has, ever since that period, been divided amongst the various governments of modern time. Yet, it has pleased God to single out the nation to which it is our happiness to belong, for the most profuse bestowal of his favours both in providence and in grace. He has set us on a hill, so that other nations cannot but admire the distinguished mercies so lavishly conferred upon us. He has endowed our people with an untiring spirit of activity, unquenchable ardour in enterprise, and

most persevering patience in labour: and yet, at the same time, the restlessness, and excitement, and independence, which such a temperament naturally engenders, is balanced by a remarkable love of order and justice, of loyalty and peace. He has extended the limits of our empire to every continent, and placed under the dominion of our sovereign an ample territory, on which the sun never sets: and yet, these mighty realms are not held together by overpowering armies, or oppressive tyranny, but we live under the mildest of all constitutions, and every British subject enjoys the fullest liberty, united with the most secure protection. And, doubtless, this industry and this liberty are to be traced, in great measure, to that which is God's paramount gift, our blessing of blessings, the pure unadulterated Gospel—a Bible, not hidden in the darkness of a foreign tongue, not chained or locked by Popish intolerance, but published in our own language, and (through the benevolence of pious persons) sold so cheaply, that the poorest of our population may procure this richest treasure with which the world is furnished. And then, as a consequence of this opened Bible, we are favoured with a National Church, (which may God graciously purify and enlarge!), whose Articles and Liturgy are grounded on the sole and sufficient authority of Holy Scrip-

ture; a Church which is Protestant, inasmuch as it openly avows its opposition to Romish errors and superstitions; and Apostolical, inasmuch as it is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." (Eph. ii. 20.)

During the past week, in the metropolis of this great empire, an event has taken place which has called the attention of all the nations of the earth to our country, and has attracted many of their inhabitants to its shores. Great as is the magnitude of that undertaking in itself, the minds of all classes are led almost involuntarily to look beyond it, and to anticipate important consequences to result from it. For my own part, I do not doubt that, in the providence of God, the Great Exhibition will be productive of much that is beneficial, because its promoters designed it, under the sense of "the Almighty's goodness," with a view to strengthen the bonds of peace and goodwill between nation and nation, class and class, man and man; and have consecrated to Him the trophies of man's ingenuity and industry by solemn prayer. THE GREAT EXHIBITION is, indeed, a singular sign of our times. Since the creation of the world, there never was a period when such a gathering of nations with their fruits of toil, could have been made; for, it is only within comparatively recent

days that the facility of communication admitted of such a conflux to one point. And even the writers of our public journals seem to be constrained to speak with awe of the probable development of God's purposes towards mankind, which the peculiar occurrences of our epoch indicate.

It was indeed a blessed contrast to the impiety of Belshazzar, surrounded by the splendour of an eastern court, "lifting up himself against the God of heaven," and "praising the gods of gold, of silver, of brass, and of iron, of wood, and of stone," when our beloved and honoured Queen stood in the midst of that silent multitude, and our venerable Archbishop,—worn with years of labour in the cause of the Redeemer, (years more numerous, and labours more abundant, than the generality of the most devoted of Christ's ministers have attained),—implored the benediction of our common LORD upon this nation, and on all the kindreds of the human family.

So far all has been well; and "The God in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways, has been in some measure glorified." But here I fear that our danger may begin. It may be imagined that all has been done for God that is necessary, and that Mammon may be allowed to have the remainder. There is too much reason to apprehend that a vast increase of vice, and Sab-

bath-breaking, and profaneness, may be added to the iniquity already abounding in our demoralized metropolis, and that national pride may be fostered; and foreign visitors, instead of being led to bless the Lord our God, as the Queen of Sheba did, when she came from the uttermost parts of the earth, to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and to behold the magnificence of his kingdom, may leave our shores worse than when they arrived. I would therefore avail myself of the present occasion to enforce the duty of seeking the glory of God, as the paramount object of life, and the end of all we do; and will endeavour, in dependence on Divine help, to explain the reasons why we should glorify God, the sin of neglecting so to do, and the manner in which all may contribute to advance the glory of our Maker and Redeemer.

We are to notice, in the first place,

I. *Some reasons why we are bound to glorify God.*

We are His by *Creation*, and on this account it is our duty to seek His glory. "In His hand is our breath." There is something very affecting in this announcement. It was God that first breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, and He still holds that breath in His own hand. We cannot so much as effect the simple process of respiration, except by the permission of His will,

and the exertion of His power. Think of the innumerable times, by day and night, that, by the involuntary action of the muscular system, this function, so essential to life, is repeated. And then, call to mind that "in God's hand is the breath of every living thing, and the life of all mankind," (Job xii. 10,) so that in one instant He can suspend the vital action, and reduce each one of us to a breathless corpse. Upon this ground the Almighty challenges the attention of His creatures. "Thus saith God the Lord, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it: He that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein." (Is. xlii. 5.) And can He advance a more unquestionable claim to our obedient observance of His commands? Is it not our "reasonable service," to present "our bodies a living sacrifice" to Him that made them, and sustains them in being? Yes, brethren; and every moment we live without living to God, and every thing we do adverse to His glory, is rebellion against his sovereignty, and idolatrous service rendered to self or sin.

We are His, also, by *Providence*. "His are all our ways." Jeremiah was persuaded of the truth that "the way of man is not in himself; it

is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." The faculty of reason, under the influence of which we purpose, and contrive, and act, is bestowed by God. The genius which investigates the properties of matter, and applies them to the convenience of man, is certainly as much the direct gift of God, as the material objects of Creation upon which that genius is exerted. In all the discoveries of science, and in all the productions of art, we cannot fail to recognise the perpetual supervision of God's Providence, who at first formed His various creatures for our benefit, adapted them with consummate skill to our use and comfort, and implanted in us the understanding to apply them to the various arts and accommodations of life. The manufacturer, who acknowledges not the goodness of God in the mighty machinery which the inventive ingenuity of man has framed to facilitate labour, and to bring the elements under his control, is guilty of the same ungodliness as the husbandman who impiously "thanked his dung-cart" for the fertility of his fields. It is said to have been the iniquity of the ancient heathen, that they "sacrificed unto their *net*, and burned incense unto their *drag*; because *by them* their portion was fat, and their meat plenteous." (Habakkuk i. 16.) To take the glory of our prosperity to ourselves, is as truly idolatry, as

to sacrifice to Baal. We are bound to glorify God for all we are, and all we have, and all we are enabled to effect; and to ascribe all to His might and mercy, who "giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding." (Dan. ii. 21.)

But, further, We are His by *Redemption*. This is the argument which St. Paul uses as conclusive and irresistible. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.) We are all the sinful children of sinful Adam; lost, fallen, and destroyed; without hope or possibility of recovery in ourselves. But we have all been born into a world redeemed. Our reconciliation with God has been effected by the atoning sufferings of His own dear Son. Divine love has accomplished the plan for our recovery. "The Lamb of God" has borne the burden of the sins of a guilty world. And now, the message of peace, the promise of pardon, the invitation of grace, the glad tidings of great joy, are published to every creature; 'Come, and embrace the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and receive forgiveness, sanctifying influence, adoption, and life eternal.' Dear brethren, have *you* obeyed the summons? Have *you* "received the atonement?" Have *you* closed with God's proffered mercy in Christ? Do

you enjoy, in any measure, the peace which passeth the world's understanding, the hope that never maketh ashamed, the joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not? Oh! then, how forcible is the plea, which all this favour supplies, to constrain you to glorify God! This is, indeed, a discovery of God's love which Belshazzar never knew. And consequently, great as was his sin, terrible as was his alarm, and miserable as was his doom; we deserve a far heavier punishment, if, with our "clearer knowledge, and more abundant obligations, and more manifest responsibility," we refuse to render unto Christ the honour due unto his name.

We pass on to consider, in the second place,

II. *The sin of neglecting to glorify God.* To make this clear, let me observe that such neglect implies the absence of right principles in the heart, and the presence of such as are evil.

(1.) It implies *the absence of right principles.* Motives are to the soul, what the eye is to the body. If there be a defect in the organ of vision, we know that all objects appear confused, or are concealed in obscurity. "If thine eye be single," said Jesus, "thy whole body shall be full of light: but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Jeremy Taylor has left on record an apt explanation of our Lord's words.

“Holy intention is to the actions of a man that which the soul is to the body, or form to its matter, or the root to the tree, or the sun to the world, or the fountain to the river, or the base to a pillar: for, without these, the body is a dead trunk, the matter is sluggish, the tree is a block, the world is darkness, the river is quickly dry, the pillar rushes into flatness and ruin; and the action is sinful, or unprofitable and vain. The poor farmer that gave a dish of cold water to Artaxerxes was rewarded with a golden goblet; and he that gives the same to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall have a crown; but if he gives water in despite, when the disciple needs wine or a cordial, his reward shall be to want that water to cool his tongue.”* Solomon says, “An high look, and a proud heart, and *the ploughing of the wicked*, is sin.” (Prov. xxi. 4.) The wicked man tills his land in the same manner as the righteous: no perceptible difference is to be observed in surveying their respective work. Yet “God is angry with the wicked every day,” and all day long; for in all the wicked man does, he has respect only to himself: he has no sense of God’s bounty, and no zeal for God’s honour. The Gospel command is, “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. x. 31.) Thus the most trivial actions of daily life

* Holy Living. Sect. II.

are sanctified, and become essentially religious, when done in the fear of God, with the acknowledgment of dependance upon Him, and with gratitude for his grace and blessing ; while, on the other hand, the absence of a regard to God, renders sinful the ordinary transactions of business and labour, even as the leper of old communicated uncleanness to everything he touched. But, further, the neglect to glorify God in all we do,—

(2.) Implies *the presence of wrong dispositions in the heart.*

Man seeks to glorify *himself*, instead of the Almighty Jehovah: and what sin can be greater than thus to dethrone God from his supremacy, and to elevate self in His place? Scripture affords us many instances of the displeasure with which He regards such an affront to his Majesty.

Take the case of one who did not belong to the number of God's people.

Nebuchadnezzar, the proud king of the Chaldean empire, was walking in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and, as he surveyed the noble edifices which had been erected during his reign, he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Dan. iv. 30.) While the word was yet in his mouth, the judg-

ment of God fell upon him: he was deprived of his reason, and changed for a time into a senseless idiot; by which most humiliating of all afflictions, he was taught that "those that walk in pride, God is able to abase." (Dan. iv. 37.)

Next, take the case of one of God's faithful servants, Hezekiah, whom the Lord "left to himself that He might try him, and know all that was in his heart." (2 Chron. xxxii. 31.) On his recovery from that dangerous sickness, which had been miraculously cured, the King of Babylon sent ambassadors of the princes of Babylon to congratulate him. Hezekiah's pride was puffed up by the flattering visit; and, instead of seizing the opportunity to make known to these travellers from a far country the precious revelation of Divine truth which he possessed but they had not, he was intent only on displaying to them "the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures." (2 Kings xx. 13.) The Lord immediately noticed his sin, and sent to him this message by the Prophet Isaiah: "What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? and what have they seen in thine house?" (2 Kings xx. 13.) And this searching inquiry was followed by the denunciation that all those treasures, of

which Hezekiah was so proud, should be "carried into Babylon, and nothing should be left." It was not the mere showing of his treasures, but the wrong disposition in his heart, which actuated him to do so, that brought down on Hezekiah so severe a chastisement for neglecting to glorify God.

And, with reference to ourselves, whether nationally or individually, the absence of right motives and principles, or the presence of such as are wrong, defiles all our actions, and renders them sinful in the sight of God. To ensure our condemnation in the great day of Christ's appearing, it is not necessary that we should be charged with Belshazzar's sensuality and idolatry: it will be sufficient if it be witnessed against us, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified."

In conclusion, let me call attention to,—

III. *The manner in which we may all contribute to the glory of God; and especially so at this present season.*

(1.) Glorify God by *personal holiness*. Our Saviour charges his disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. v. 16.) Christians are called "the light of the world." By a holy walk and conversation,

we are to reflect the perfections of our Lord and Master. We shine, indeed, not by an inherent, but by a borrowed light. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must *first* shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ." When God thus illumines a soul by his grace, it begins to shine to his honour. It is not one or two looks at that glorious face that is sufficient for the Christian. By continually beholding, as in a glass, the glory of God's justice, truth, and love, as they are revealed in the person and work of the Saviour, we must be "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." Let Christians, therefore, consider that the eyes of the world are upon them, and that the glory of God is very greatly affected by their conduct. It has been well observed that they who pay little regard to the stars that shine, each in its appointed place in the firmament, will yet be observant enough of a falling star; and, in like manner, they who overlook the radiance of a long succession of God's servants, all quietly doing his will, will mark with triumph the fall of one professing Christian, and derive from it an argument against all serious religion. Foreign nations have *heard* much of the religious superiority of England. Will what they *see* agree with what they have *heard*? Oh! that our country,

and each individual in it, may arise and shine to the glory of God! Then will foreign visitors carry away the reflection, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." (Deut. iv. 6.)

(2.) Glorify God *by prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. We read in ancient history, that when King Xerxes reviewed the almost countless host with which he was about to invade Greece, the largest and best appointed army that Persia ever sent forth, he wept at the thought that, in a few years, all that noble multitude would be reduced to the dust of death. Surely, a Christian has much more cause for sympathy, when he contemplates the crowd of eager inquirers, the wise and distinguished of many lands, who are hastening to our metropolis, to satisfy their curiosity by inspecting the aggregate results of human labour in the Great Exhibition. These are immortal souls; and so are all the population of the globe; and soon all earthly distinctions will be done away; and monarch and slave, sage and peasant, will lie in the grave, till the morning of the resurrection summons all nations before the Redeemer, to receive their final destination in Heaven, or in Hell. Oh! what an argument is this for prayer, that God would "pour out His Spirit upon all flesh;" that He would "thrust forth labourers into His harvest;" that He would put

an end to vice, superstition, and idolatry; and hasten the time when "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea!" (Hab. ii. 14.)

(3.) Glorify God *by contributing to those Societies which are labouring to extend Christ's kingdom at home and abroad.* These are eminently the days of associated effort. Without an extraordinary union and combination of labour, such an undertaking as that which has just been brought to a successful issue, could never have been accomplished. Nor can the demoralized population of our own country be provided with the means of grace, or heathen nations be won for Christ, without similar associated exertions. Every individual should be aware of his personal responsibility to take part in these benevolent designs. Every one should contribute liberally, according to the ability which God has given him, to extend the Redeemer's kingdom amongst our own people, and in heathen lands. The Church Missionary Society is engaged in making known the saving name of Christ throughout the heathen world; and, year after year, God is graciously crowning its labours with a rich blessing. The Church Pastoral-Aid Society provides salaries for faithful and laborious curates in the overgrown and spiritually-destitute parishes of our own land. I would urge on all

who desire to advance the glory of God, to "lend unto Him," (it is the condescending language of His own word,) by contributing to these Christian objects. How soon will the fashion of this world pass away! how trifling do its grandest scenes appear in the light of eternity! But a soul saved from sin and death will survive the wreck of the world, and be a perpetual monument to the honour of God. And when the great gathering of God's redeemed shall take place, and "the multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, shall stand before the throne of God, and before the Lamb;" how happy shall we be, if, by divine grace, we are not only ourselves admitted to join that joyful throng, but shall also have been the means, in God's hand, of leading some others to the participation of the same ineffable and everlasting blessedness.

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