

Large Book Skeletons

No. 688

Flight 3 Term

14

God Requiring the Past

Ecclesiastes III: 15. "God requirerth that which is past"

Upon the great sundial at Oxford College is inscribed the Latin mottoe: "Pereunt et imputantur": the hours perish and are imputed. S.B. III: 99 1570: 158.

Somewhat similar seems to be the sense of this ancient Hebrew mottoe which has found its way among the compilation of wise sayings, by that greatest of sages: "God requirerth that which is past." Both express the instinct of human hearts as to "accountability for lost time".

The marginal rendering: "that which is driven away," and others render: "pushed away" - "crowded out." Lange thinks the true rendering is "pursued", and concedes that the expression does undoubtedly refer to time past but not after the common representation of something

left behind us, but rather of something sent before or gone before, which is chased and shall be overtaken.

The Koran, for instance, frequently gives expression to the thought which had its root in the ancient Arabic theology, that the lives of all men and especially their sins are all gone before to meet them at the judgment.

The "flight of time" is a metaphor, common to all ages, tongues & peoples, and it has always been conceived as very rapid: "sed fugit interea fugit irreparabile tempus." Time flies and never can be recalled."

Ovid's Metamorphoses XV: 181. represents the ages as driving away their predecessors, and taking their places

ut unda impellitur unda

Urgeturque prior venienti, urgetque priorem
Tempora sic fugiunt pariter pariterque sequunt.

"As wave by wave is driven in the sea,
Each urging that which is before, and then
Itself impelled by that behind, again,
So do the hours pursuing, also flee."

The figure in the text presents to the mind the same general image, but adds to it something more uncommon and impressive. The very words used imply or suggest the flying homicide pursued by the avenger or inquisitor of blood. And the figure however unusual is perfectly clear and apprehensible: "God will make inquiry for that which is pursued. that which is gone before us, and which has seemingly fled away and escaped forever. They are not gone. these flying hours - these passages of wrong. they shall be overtaken in their flight."

and made to appear standing up in their lot at some
latter day of solemn inquisition. Time past though fled
from us, is not lost from god's knowledge or remembrance
and so

"What was, is present, now

The future has already been;

And god demands again the ages fled"

This thought is perfectly consistent with other thoughts
which are suggested in this same book. The ages are to
reappear in judgment. God shall arraign at his aw-
ful bar the centuries of wrong, oppression, injustice
robbery and persecution - the "homicidal centuries"
shall find no city of refuge in the oblivion of the
past. "God will bring into judgment every work" is

It is a curious fact that all through the Greek drama runs this indefinite notion of retribution, at sometime in some manner - however long delayed though

"the mills of the gods grind slow", and however secret and subtle its processes though

"the feet of the avenging deities are shod with wool," retribution for wrong must eventually take place - retribution open, penal, positive - and not merely the retribution of natural consequences but of divine decrees. And the traditions and mythologies of the race correspond in this idea, because its root is after all in the human ^{consciousness and} conscience - which affirms that there will and must be a day when the wrongs of this life are righted. The drama of history has a final adjustment.

Lang.

In this text are recognized several momentous facts & truths.

1. The rapid passage of the hours into an irrecoverable past.
2. The certainty that the record of these hours does not pass into oblivion
3. The Retribution of a future state as a part of the judicial government of God
4. Indirectly the insignificance of all time in comparison with Eternity.
5. Also the value of opportunities which once lost are lost forever.
6. The accusers of the soul in a future state are but the voices of our own misspent life.
7. The duty of living with Eternity in view.

1. Who can escape the impression of the swift flight of time?

thy days are swifter than a weavers shuttle. Job.

Not only is time passing but we are passing with it.

As we say our time is passing away. Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis."

Sixty persons die every minute, three thousand six hundred every hour, 86,400 every day - 31,566,227 every year

Every beat of the pendulum which marks a second of time ~~thus~~ carries one soul to the extremity of its arc of life. And so while we read that the days of our years are threescore years and ten, the average of life is much smaller, for a whole generation 1200 000 000 actually passes away, every 33 years - three times a century.

And yet there is an instinct in man that this short life is not man's whole period of existence.

Dr Johnson defines time as "a parenthesis of Eternity" 1431:175
He may look no further than the material world and the
created universe and get a glimpse of infinite time
The pagan defined god as "Time without bounds" and
we can see that he got the conception of illimitable time
or duration where he got that of illimitable space or
extension. We look into these starry depths and we
find cycles which are only accomplished after
millions of years. distances which are so great that
the human mind faints in the attempt to grasp
the idea of universal space. when the unit of meas-
urement by which we measure the distance of
fixed stars is the 200 000 miles over which light
travels in a second. etc

"During the period in which a volcano cooled and from its congealed streams of lava a wooded mountain was formed, while the crater became a calm deep lying lake generations passed away. It took from three to four thousand years to complete the transformation. Compared with such hardness the longest wars appear like the rapid blazing of a fire of brushwood, and the prolonged suffering of a human being as the momentary death of a beetle crushed under our foot. M. Angelo. 60-

Now who can look at all these indications of duration without conceivable limit without feeling instinctively that man is immortal! Why here are mere hills that exist so long we call them "eternal": and even the stars and systems whose orbits are so vast

suggesting periods still more vast, are but huge masses of matter. Can it be that man, who subdues the physical creation - sits at his telescope & weighs the stars in a balance and maps out their courses &c. and as Kepler said thinks Gods thoughts after him is so short lived that his life is but a mere insignificant fraction in comparison to the period of their duration? He the conscious, intelligent rational & moral creation dies in a few years -

1200000000 thrice a century, while the outermost planet of our solar system Neptune is accomplishing two thirds of a single revolution about the sun!! 720:276

Independent of a divine revelation, the instinct of man affirms it cannot be! How much more after Christ has brought life etc to light!

Chalmers used to say - "What is the object of mathematical Science? Magnitude and the proportions of magnitude. But then sin I had forgotten two magnitudes: I thought not of the littleness of time: I recklessly thought not of the greatness of eternity." S.B: 1.6. And both of these are the inheritance of man! In his earthly existence he discovers the insignificance of time; in his future state, he is yet to span the vast proportions of an endless life! And only in the light of that future can we read and interpret this transient existence and its grandly awful significance as the threshold or vestibule of the Hereafter. God requireth that which is past because this life is a probation for immortality! This makes every moment precious.

⁵¹¹ This one thing is often the secret spring of a noble life.

Matthew Hale was one of the most industrious of men - he read, thought, wrote with a diligence and success known but to few. His published and unpublished works are numerous and various, and shew research into natural philosophy and moral philosophy, mathematics and medicine, anatomy and surgery, history and theology. And at the foundation of his success as Dr. J. Stoughton has shewn lay simply this: he set a becoming value on time. Every moment was precious, as the grains of gold which men sift out from the sand and melt into masses, the rich ingots, which freight our argosies. Hale wrote his contemplations when on his circuits.

So Dr Mason good translated Suetonius in his carriage and So Dr Darwin composed nearly all his works in his Sulkys. age, riding as a physician from door to door. One of the Doaridges wrote his exhortor chiefly before breakfast - Chancellors of France, Daguesseau wrote a bulky and able volume, in the successive daily intervals of delay in serving his dinner, as Madame de Genlis composed several of her charming volumes, while waiting for her pupil, the princess to whom she gave daily lessons - Dr Burney learned French and Italian on horseback and Kirk White became a Greek Scholar from studies carried on in walks to and from a lawyers office. Franklin at odd moments gathered his great stock of knowledge, and Elihu Burritt first discovered his faculty of self-improvement in the resolute employment of his fragments of time - in the intervals

of horse shoeing, mastering eighteen ancient and modern tongues and twenty two European dialects.

Thus the Roman Emperor is said to have exclaimed 'I have lost a day!' and many a man must like him make the same confession: but sometimes it is the mere language of vain regret. Melancthon used to note down every lost hour, to reanimate his industry and quicken his conscience and resolution. Jackson of Exeter remarks that in the dissipation of worldly treasure, the frugality of the future may balance the extravagance of the past; but who can say 'I will take from minutes tomorrow to compensate for those I have lost today?' 1430:162. 1570:157.

"Opportunity has hair in front; behind she is bald: if you seize her by the forelock you may hold her; but if suffered to escape not Jupiter himself can catch her again. "Latin".
1570: 144

So represented the old poets and painters, opportunity or occasion. Knox & Life 204. Speaking to Heart. 18.

Every moment is an opportunity - valuable for what it can accomplish even for this life - invaluable in view of what it can accomplish for the life to come. Seize it and you make it forever yours - lose it and it is lost forever! No amount of sorrow over a forfeited good recalls or recovers it. The future is improvable but the past irrecoverable and irrevocable! He who undervalues the worth of his moments not only risks the success & service of his present life but all that is beyond

Redeeming the time: See Dean Howson.

"Sibyl".

Forestalling opportunity - (Col. 4: 15. Eph. 5: 16.) i.e. buy up
an article out of the market which will never be offered
so cheap again, in order to make from it the largest
possible profit: which finds illustration in the ^{Roman} fable
of the Sibyl who came to the palace of Tarquin Second
thrice offering her precious volumes but each time
lessened in number and higher in price than before.
See auction! Life is the agora - and the hours are the
Sibylline volumes. He who by his diligence and
industry secures them is like the wise merchant
who watches his opportunity to secure his stock
at the lowest market (able) price while the fool who
listlessly lets opportunity pass, finds the hours each
time less in number and more precious because fewer!

1)
Physical nature abounds in illustrations of opportunity. Vessels cruising among arctic seas, sometimes get involved among islands of floating ice, which approach nearer and nearer, until the space which they enclose becomes fearfully narrow, and the only chance of escape to the vessel is to sail through these narrow straits before the fatal moment when like the rush of two continents the masses meet with a terrific crash.

Again here is a strip of sand stretching around a sea-side cove, and the rising tide, with each new wave touches a higher flood mark. in a few moments the strip will be completely covered, and those who are gathering shells + seaweed inside the cove cannot escape". 1431:174.

The Value of a Minute.

A small vessel was nearing the steep holmes in the Bristol Channel. The captain stood on the deck, his watch in his hand, his eye fixed on it.

A terrible tempest had driven them onward, and the vessel was a scene of devastation. No one dared to ask, "Is there hope?" Silent consternation filled every heart, made every face pale. The wind and the tide drove the shattered bark fiercely forward. Every moment they were hurried nearer to the sullen rock which knew no mercy, on which many ill fated vessels had foundered, all the crew perishing.

Still the captain stood motionless, speechless, his watch in his hand. "We are lost!" was the conviction of many around him.

Suddenly his eye glanced across the sea; he stood erect; another moment, and he cried, "Thank God, we are saved! the tide has turned: in one minute more we should have been on the rocks!" He returned his chronometer, by which he had thus measured the race between time and tide, to his pocket; and if they never felt it before, assuredly both he and his crew were on that day powerfully taught the value of a minute.

Escape for thy Life.

There was an ingenious torture which consisted of a cell, which at the prisoner's first entrance presented an air of ease and comfort. After a few days' confinement he began to see that its walls were gradually contracting. The discovery once made, the fact became more appalling every day. Slowly, but terribly, the sides drew closer, and the unhappy victim was at last crushed to death. What an emblem does this present of the sinner's contracting day of grace! Oh, what would the poor victim

The principal value of the moments lies not so much in the relations they bear to our temporal well-being or even earthly usefulness. but again let us affirm it: Now is the accepted time - day of Salvation! There is no fatality about sin or ruin - but there is a fatality - a fixed, unalterable law about the gradual rapid certain lapse of life. We need not sin nor forfeit Salvation - but we must grow old - and feel the power of habit and die. "Day of grace"

Time is given us to prepare for Eternity; and eternity will not be too long to regret the loss of time" (1429: 120.

As we stand here at the close of another year - what should be our attitude of mind and heart and will! The year has fled - behind us for it is now forever reckoned with the past - before us for it goes before to judgment. The Past struggles to drag it into oblivion - God has his hold upon it and it is summoned as a witness to appear at his bar of judgment where there is no oblivion of past years! That will be a solemn procession of years - before the throne - every misspent day and hour and moment - every neglected Sabbath and opportunity will there reappear! Can you face, in self dependence these "imputed hours"?

Who are our accusers in the future state? What are God's Books of remembrance which register our good & evil deeds? Our own lives. The hours which pass unimproved or perverted to self destructive purposes become our accusers there. You know these curious arrangements of complicated mechanism whereby a watchman's fidelity is noted - if he fails to be at his post on the rounds of duty, he cannot leave his impress on the revolving tablet and a blank becomes his accuser tomorrow. How many blanks on the circling tablet of a year now almost fled, appear before the recording angel - Overhiser's suggestion at Miss Lee's funeral that every soul which passes into judgment renders an account for us, indirectly, who might have blessed it.

In the life of Dr Thomas Arnold, the abelard of his times, no careful observer can fail to trace that deep consciousness of the invisible world, and that power of bringing it before him in the midst and thro' the means of his most active engagements which constituted the peculiarity of his religious life and the moving spring of his whole life. Arnold life 1: 41. 42

A golden chain of heavenward thoughts and humble prayers, whether standing or sitting, in the intervals of work or of amusement, linked together his more special and solemn devotions, and this consciousness of an invisible presence gave calmness and collectedness to his whole life amid commotions and repose amid disturbing accidents, and made toil a rest & refreshment, while it enabled him to meet trial with serenity & composure

Here is the simple but subtle secret of a life well spent.
Eternity is never forgotten! The consciousness of the
invisible present and the unseen future is always
before the mind. Every decision is weighed in the scale
of immortality! its relations to the future are scanned
and its bearings on destiny carefully examined!
No man lives truly whose life is not pervaded &
permeated by this consciousness. This is walking
with god. an unseen companion, whose existence
spans the eternities, is the fellow pilgrim of the
soul whose true land - country, habitation are be-
yond. And only he who thus walks with god may
calmly look upon the hours which perish and the
reckoning which is to come when god requirerth the Past.