A THREEFOLD CALL

A SERMON

PREACHED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

BY

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DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

ON

JUNE 28, 1868

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE QUEEN'S CORONATION

ON OCCASION OF

The Public Thanksgiving

FOR THE ESCAPE OF

H. R. H. THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH

AND FOR THE SUCCESS OF

THE ABYSSINIAN WAR

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THIS SERMON

PREACHED IN THEIR PRESENCE, AND PRINTED AT THEIR DESIRE

Is Dedicated

WITH GRATEFUL AND DUTIFUL ATTACHMENT

TO

THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES

A THREEFOLD CALL.

'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.'—1 SAM. iii. 9.

So spoke[1] the youthful Prophet and ruler after he had thrice heard the Divine call. It was in the darkness of the early morning; the seven-branched candlestick alone lighted up the curtains of the Tabernacle. There knelt the innocent child, as we see him pictured by the greatest of English painters; his little hands clasped in prayer; his bright eyes looking upwards towards a light which none but he could see, towards a voice which none but he could hear—the likeness of that touching sight which every parent knows who sees his little ones first beginning to falter their infant prayers, and murmur their infant hymns.

But the same truth which is taught us by the sight of our children at their prayers—all attention, all reception—by the story of the young

[1] First Lesson of the Evening Service.

Hebrew Prophet thus receiving deep into his soul the first of that long succession of prophetic revelations, is forced upon us by the more impressive events of the lives, whether of nations or of individuals. Again and again a call is made to us, as distinct, if we would but listen to it, as that which came to Samuel. A call to duty, a call to thankfulness, a call to better and serious thoughts; and what is needed is that we should be able to say, 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant HEARETH.' That is the difficulty. The whirl of business, the succession of enjoyments, the clatter of voices around us, the strife of parties, the drowsiness of indolence, the blindness of passion, the deafness of prejudice—all these distract our attention, shut our eyes, close our ears. It is this need of a pause, of a lull, which makes it good for us to have our thoughts arrested and diverted by any marked anniversary, by any solemn remembrance of public events, by any stirring incident in our own experience. A silence then falls around us; a still small voice can then make itself audible. The Lord speaks; and for the moment our ears are open to hear His call.

Such a call, in more ways than one, this day brings to us.

I. It is now just thirty years since this Abbey was the scene of the most splendid and moving spectacle that our generation has witnessed. It was on the 28th of June, 1838, that the nobles, commons, and clergy of England were gathered within these walls to welcome to the throne a Sovereign, whose youthful promise and queenly grace awakened again a flame of loyal devotion, a spring of serious hope, such as was thought to have well-nigh died out from amongst us. To Her, on that bright summer day, came the awful, yet inspiring summons to preside wisely and justly over the great people here represented around her. And to the nation at large, not only in this Abbey, or in this metropolis, but in many a rustic church, and in many a retired village, throughout the Empire, was brought home the feeling that we were one people and one family, with one heart and one soul, bound together to promote each other's welfare, and to lift our thoughts upwards to 'whatsoever things were 'true and honest, just and pure, lovely and of 'good report.' It was this common feeling of national unity and national duty—this electric sentiment with which the whole air was charged, that gave a deeper meaning to every word of that solemn ceremony, a fresh significance to every

splendour of that grand pageant. The Queen was in the midst of her people; each on that day was given to each; a new era seemed to open for each; an era of new happiness and usefulness for the one, of new glory and greatness for the other—of Christian progress towards perfection for both.

Thirty years have passed away—thirty years of how much loss and of how much gain to all of us! How many have been snatched away from the home, or Church, or State, or Throne of which they were the stay and support. How many have been the noble opportunities passed by—how many the good deeds not attempted until it was, or seemed to be, too late. And yet how much also has been added to us; how happily round that royal seat have risen up the children, and the children's children of the future dynasty; how much of pure renown has been added to the English name in peace and war; how many a noble Christian deed has lighted up far and wide the dark corners of our land. In the mere thought of these vicissitudes—in the grateful remembrance of what has been done for us, of evils extinguished which, we trust, shall never reappear, of good accomplished which, we trust, shall never be reversed—in the bitter grief for good which might have been done and has been

left undone—in the enkindling hope of all the splendid and useful and holy works that still remain to be done—in all these thoughts the call is repeated this day; and may each of us, from the highest to the lowest, renew that covenant which then was made, and say, 'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.' The nation has advanced fast and far on its way; the nineteenth century itself is moving towards its close. It is for each one of us to keep pace with it, to feel that on each and all of us depends the right direction of that onward journey. 'Speak, Lord;' let us hear and understand Thy will; we are indeed all ears to hear, and all eyes to see, if Thou wilt but guide us rightly.

II. And now there come to us two special calls again, from most different quarters, awakening most different feelings, yet still pointing to the same end; calls from the uttermost extremities of the earth, which reached our shores within the same twenty-four hours, and which by this very coincidence made us feel the vastness and variety of the sphere, the loftiness and breadth of the task, which Englishmen have before them.

Let us ask what is the call conveyed to us in each of the two events, for which we are invited to express our thankfulness to Almighty God, and which are thus happily combined on

this auspicious day. In each there is a lesson beyond the event itself. Let us open our ears to hear it.

Look first at the victory with which our arms have been crowned in Abyssinia. Rarely indeed in the annals of warfare, has a great purpose been carried out so exactly within the limits of time and space, foreseen and prescribed, as that which the endurance of our soldiers and the skill of their chiefs has achieved in that distant land. For this blessed close of deep anxiety, for these marvellous gifts of God's Spirit to our race and country, we offer our unfeigned thanks. But even more than these is the mercy vouchsafed to us of the power of showing in the light of these achievements, the bright example of a war unstained by the slightest tinge of ambition, by the slightest taint of gain—a war, reluctantly undertaken, laboriously carried out, magnificently successful, not for the sake of territory or wealth, but for the sake of redeeming from captivity a handful of Englishmen, with their wives and children. The European world looked at our armament with wonder; they treated with incredulous scorn our protestations that so vast an enterprise was undertaken for so small an object; they

could not think it possible that a great nation would enter on so great a war for so simple and so barren a purpose. Thank God, we have shown that it was possible; and therefore when we read of that long march for many a weary league, over Alpine heights, and under burning suns, of that fierce fight on Good Friday morning, of the entrance into that mountain fastness on Easter Monday, it is not so much over the fall of Magdala, or the death of its chief, that we triumph gloriously, as over the false and wicked doctrine that nations can only fight for unworthy objects, and soldiers be courageous only when their recompense is plunder. It is not so much for the valour of the enterprise or the splendour of the achievement that we thank Almighty God, as because He has, by that valour and that splendour, enabled us to set 'on a hill which 'cannot be hid' the great Christian principle of uniting might with right, power with forbearance. 'Better is he that ruleth his own 'spirit than he that taketh a city.' As a just cause is a sufficient ground for a mighty war, so also a just cause is its own sufficient and exceeding great reward. 'Speak, Lord,' to England and to Europe—'speak, Lord,' and let Thy servants hear. Let us hear in those trumpet-calls of

Abyssinian victory, the call to justice and mercy, wherever God shall lead us. Let us, as our hearts throb in receiving back our soldiers from that strange mysterious country, welcome in them the true successors and sons of the knights of old, who fought for truth and right, not for gold or land—let us feel that in their deeds humanity itself has made a step onwards, and that the kingdom of God which is not of this world has acquired a new possession in the heart and mind of Christendom. Let us be taught to value the Divine gifts of courage and skill; but let us be taught to value still more deeply the Divine duties of justice, generosity, and self-control.

III. There is another call of God from a yet more distant shore, which comes still nearer home. It is that which reaches all our hearts through the merciful Providence which has sheltered from death a Prince of our Royal House.

The horror of a reckless crime—the thankfulness for a life full of youthful hope rescued from an untimely end—the sympathy with those who have thus regained, as on this day, a son, a brother, from the grave—these are the natural Christian feelings which rise unbidden to every heart, and which are but weakened

by the reflections of preacher or teacher. As in the most pathetic of all the Gospel miracles, the great Healer of sorrows has raised from the bier 'the son of his mother.' 'Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And He 'delivered him to his mother; and she was a 'widow.' In the words also of the most pathetic of all the Gospel parables, 'It is meet that we 'should make merry and be glad; for this thy 'brother was dead and is alive again, was lost 'and is found.'

'It is indeed very meet, right, and our 'bounden duty, that we should at all times and 'in all places give thanks to thee, O Lord, Holy 'Father, Almighty Everlasting God,' whenever the springs of pure domestic love are stirred within us, whenever a sudden shock awakens us to the sense of the nearness and dearness of family ties, and home-affections. Never may we cease to feel the force of that sacred passion. Never may we cease to rise above ourselves into the fellow-feeling of delight with which the brother welcomes home the brother, and the mother the son. Speak Lord, on this, and like occasions, to all our hearts. We are silent; our common, vulgar, baser, selfish murmurings and babblings are hushed. Speak to us, for thy servants hear; speak to us of tender kindly

emotions; speak to us of the blessedness of peacemakers; speak to us of the purity and loveliness of domestic affections—speak to us of the infinite preciousness of a life, of a living soul, rescued from sudden destruction, preserved for all those noble and beneficent purposes which God places before each human spirit, specially before those whom He has set in the high places of the earth, and endowed with the capacities of greatness.

And here again, as in that other call of which I spoke, there comes a voice of yet deeper import, a strain of a yet higher mood, than at first catches our ears. That life which has been rescued is not a mere private life. It belongs to a house which belongs not only to the nation but to the Empire. In those far off regions where it occurred, the bright side of this dark event has been, that it has awakened a sentiment of loyal, generous, unselfish, enthusiastic affection for the country and for the throne of England, such as even here we rarely see, such as there we hardly knew to exist. Old men, they say, wept for grief to think that such an inhospitable deed should have darkened their shores; the whole community went beyond and beside themselves in tokens of sympathy with the youthful sufferer, of thankfulness for

his deliverance. By that one act the whole vast continent of Australia—the whole range of English settlements along the coasts of all the Australasian Islands was moved in oneness of heart and soul with this their mother-country. They and we have been alike made to feel that we were members of one race and family, children of the same sacred hearth, subjects and fellow-citizens of the same royal commonwealth, heirs of the same great name, of the same exalted duties. To awaken such a feeling as this is the true mission of an English Prince. To furnish this link between the old world and the new, between England as she is and has been, and England's sons wherever they wander over the wide world's surface, is indeed the very task to which the children of our regal house are called, and which their royal parents fondly dreamed for them. To have become the centre of such a sympathy is indeed worth living for, is indeed a recompense for hairbreadth escapes, for suffering days and nights, the true reward of all kingly and princely labours, 'good measure, pressed down, and running over, given 'into their bosom.'

'Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.' Not for ourselves do we act, but for others; not for our own circle only, but for the great country

which is our inheritance; not for England only, but for all those multitudes of men and nations, that bear the English name and speak the English tongue, do our actions, some more, some less, extend their influence for good or for evil. In the silence of that vast expectant multitude—in the presence of those thousands and tens of thousands, seen or unseen by us—we have to perform our parts in this our generation. Speak, Lord; our souls are hushed to hear what thou hast to say to us. Great is the stake—overwhelming may be the risks—most glorious are the opportunities. Speak, Lord, and show us what our duty is—how high, how difficult, yet how happy, how blessed—show us what our duty is, and, O great God and Father, give us strength to do it.

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