

Tinsel Crowns and Golden Streets.

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'On their heads were as it were crowns like gold.'—Rev. ix. 7.

'The street of the city was pure gold.'—Rev. xxi. 21.

WE expect of a crown that it shall be of costly material. Better no crown at all than a poor pinchbeck thing. It ought to be something of value, something worth looking at, something worth preserving. On the other hand, we do not expect much of a street. It is for ordinary everyday traffic, open to all, free to the tread of every foot. All we ask of it is that it be of hard, durable, serviceable material. But the crowns in the kingdom of darkness are a sham and a delusion, while the very street of the holy city is of pure gold. The crowns are tinsel, the street is gold.

These strange creatures, called locusts, on whose head are the crowns, may be taken to represent the evil thoughts and passions that debase and destroy man. Locusts are often referred to in the Bible as a plague. A swarm of them will devastate a country with more completeness than a horde of wild beasts. And terribly destructive can be the desires and cravings of our own evil nature if they get their way; while all the time they have something attractive and alluring about them, too, like the glittering crowns on the locusts' heads.

And just as the locusts with their crowns refer to the evil in this world, to the evil in our hearts, so the heavenly Jerusalem that St. John speaks of also applies to this world, to the spiritual beauty that will yet one day characterize it. He is not speaking merely of something beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb. He says expressly, 'I, John, saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven.' Men have ever dreamed of a better day that is to be, each one picturing it according to his own idea of what a happy life should mean. And the Bible, too, has its vision of a brighter day to come. In all other dreams that men have had, the chief thing lacking has been God and His glory. They have been too much of the mere self-seeking, self-exalting, God-excluding nature. Not so with the Bible vision. In the very forefront of his description of the city, St. John refers to it as 'having the glory of God.'

God dwells in the midst of it, and obedience to Him is the greatest glory of it.

Putting these two together, then,—the locusts with their glittering crowns, and the holy city with its street of pure gold,—they suggest to us very forcibly a great distinction between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light: *the things of the one are unsubstantial and deceptive, the things of the other are real and satisfying.* The kingdom of darkness is emphatically a kingdom of falsehood. It is false in its pretensions, false in its promises. You never get what you want, you never get what you expect. You are led to expect great things, but they always turn out to be a delusion. The locusts had on their head something that had only the appearance of a crown,—crowns *as it were*, and crowns *like* gold. And therein lies the power of the kingdom of evil. Its deceptions are so attractive and so promising.

Bunyan tells us of the man with the muck-rake absorbed in drawing to himself the straws and sticks and dust of the floor, while there stood one over his head proffering him a celestial crown for his muck-rake. But often the things sought and gathered with the rake do not *appear* like sticks and straws. Were that so we should have no desire for them. They have rather the appearance of a crown itself. And many are rather like the dog in the fable, who let go his real bone to grasp what *seemed* to be a bone in the water. But, like him, you find yourself cheated, and a loser all round in the long-run.

And that is true, indeed, of everything in our life that is severed from God's glory and service. Even things innocent in themselves have no lasting beauty and power save as we connect them with God's love and God's will. Only thereby will the sweet preserve its sweetness. And, without that view of life as a whole, one could well understand the statesman who said that he had 'weighed most things in life, and found their metal not worth the clink it made.'

Secondly, the distinction is so great that the

highest things in the kingdom of darkness are worthless, the lowest in the kingdom of light are substantial and real. Nothing is higher than the crown, nothing more common than the street, but the crowns were tinsel, the street was gold. The richest treasures of evil are counterfeit. They are like the money Raphael is said to have once paid an innkeeper for his board. He painted some coins on the table that looked at a distance like gold, and only on his departure was the deception discovered. In his case, however, it was good value he gave, for a painting of his was worth more than the golden coins represented. Not so is it here. Delusion leads on every seeker, and disappointment awaits him.

Very different is it with the things of the kingdom of God. The very street is of pure gold. As the prophet said of old, 'He maketh the place of his feet glorious.' And what is the street in our cities for? For the common traffic and business of life, so full, as things are, of worry, anxiety, keen competition, and overreaching. But in this heavenly city with its street of gold, does it not mean that the traffic there will be of a transfigured kind like the ground we tread? And is not that, above all, what we need in our religion?

Some one recently referred to a saying of Samuel Rutherford, that our religion should be 'market-sweet.' That is the most difficult thing of all to make it, and the most needful. It is comparatively easy to make it church-sweet and prayer-meeting-sweet. But the most precious and most telling characteristic of it is when it becomes, say, home-sweet,—a home-sweet religion, bringing peace and pleasantness into the home relationships; and when it becomes market-sweet, making us meet our fellows on the street and market with honest dealings and kindly greetings and friendly helpings. And the miriest street in our cities would become a street of gold, were that the nature of the daily traffic passing through it. Said the wise man to a farmer, who was wont to return from the market boasting of his gains, and that no one was ever able to cheat him, 'Oh, my friend, were you as anxious not to cheat others, that lumbering cart of yours would become glorious as a chariot of the sun.'

Now, *sooner or later the distinction between the false and the real is fully recognized by all.* At first we are like those savage tribes among whom

traders go, getting the costliest products of the country in return for a few beads, or a trumpery trinket, or any worthless thing that is bright and glittering, that catches the fancy of the savage eye. We are all just like the poor cheated heathen in connexion with this great kingdom of darkness; we are attracted by glitter and show, and part with treasure beyond price for a few gaudy trifles. We give years for hours, we give soul for body, we give lifelong heartsease for a passing delight. But by and by, though often after great loss, we begin to realize that always, and in all things, without exception, the promises and rewards of evil are never fulfilled as we expected.

There was a picture in last year's Royal Academy that attracted considerable attention. It represented a young king making a triumphal entry into his capital. Banners hang out from the houses, and bright maidens scatter flowers in his path. Who could be happier, one might say, than this king as he rides through his flattering subjects? By the side of the road is a plain crucifix, and on it hangs a figure. On this figure is also a crown. The king's crown glitters with jewels, but this is a crown of thorns. The people seem to be paying no attention to the crucifix, but the king observes it as he approaches. He checks his horse, and thoughts other than those of triumph come into his face. It is that moment that is represented in the picture. The thought is passing through his mind, 'After all, what is all this but a vain show? Here, unnoticed by the shouting and acclaiming crowd, here is the true king.'

Yes, but the crown may be worn, as well as the streets trodden, in the spirit of Him whose noblest wreath was a crown of thorns, as was seen so long and so beautifully in the reign of Queen Victoria. And when that is so, there could be no lovelier spectacle, and none more worthy of homage and regard. Let us all choose, in our different spheres, the better part. It is one thing to see the distinction between that kingdom whose crowns are tinsel and that whose very streets are gold. We all come to see that, as life goes on and we meet with one disappointment and grief after another. But may God incline our hearts to choose the unsearchable riches of Christ. And then, in humble and joyful trust, it may be ours to make our own the apostle's words, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.'

Glorious things of thee are spoken;
Zion, city of our God;

He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode.

Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Harnack's 'Probleme im Texte der Leidensgeschichte Jesu.'

THERE has just been published in separate form the interesting paper read by Professor Harnack before the *Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* in Berlin, in February last, dealing with certain textual problems which arise in connexion with the history of our Lord's Passion. And whether the veteran scholar's conclusions are generally accepted or not, they at least demand careful consideration at the hands of all workers in the field of textual criticism. We shall content ourselves here with simply indicating what these conclusions are, for the benefit of those who may not have access to the original paper.

The first passage discussed is Lk 22⁴³⁻⁴⁴, a passage which, as is well known, is not regarded as part of the original text by such modern editors as Westcott and Hort, B. Weiss, and Nestle, who are able to point to an imposing array of authorities (N^BBART Syr.-Sin., etc.) in support of its omission. Harnack, however, regards this conclusion as too hasty, in view of the genuine Lukan ring of the words (note especially the mention of the angel compared with Lk 1 and 2, 24²³, and Ac 5¹⁹ 8²⁶, etc., and such characteristic Lukan expressions as ὠφθη, ἐνισχύειν, ἐκτενέστερον προσήχητο, and γινόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ. . . καὶ ἐγένετο), and the traditional support they receive so early as the first half of the second century in Justin, Tatian, and Irenæus. The main difficulty, if the words are genuine, is to discover why they should ever have been omitted. But here Harnack, as against Westcott and Hort ['There is no tangible evidence for the excision of a

¹ *Aus Sitzungsber. d. preuss. Ak. d. Wiss.* Berlin: G. Reimer. 8vo, pp. 16. M.o.50.

substantial portion of narrative for doctrinal reasons at any period of textual history' (N.T. ii. App. p. 66)], does not hesitate to appeal to dogmatic grounds. Exception, so he thinks, was early taken to the passage, both on account of the idea of an angel strengthening the Lord and of the mention of the drops of blood, as pointing to outward agony, rather than to inward conflict of soul, and in consequence, in a certain number of authorities, the words were altogether omitted. Further confirmation of this is also sought in the use made of the passage in the Fourth Gospel. For if it is referred to, as seems probable, in chap. 12²⁷ ff., the 'softening' that it there undergoes at the writer's hands is obvious. A voice out of heaven now takes the place of the angel, and the 'strengthening' and the 'drops of blood' disappear. On the whole, then, Harnack is of opinion that the verses are to be regarded as an original part of Luke's Gospel, and that in BA and Syr.-Sin. we have a purposely abridged text.

Harnack's second passage is Lk 23³³⁻³⁴, our Lord's prayer on the cross for forgiveness for His enemies, words which are wanting in N^BBD Syr.-Sin., and which in consequence are omitted by Lachmann, B. Weiss, and Westcott and Hort, though the last named claim them along with the passage we have just been considering as 'the most precious' among the remains of evangelic tradition (ii. App. p. 67). It is indeed just this very preciousness of the words, it is argued, which makes it so difficult to understand how they could ever have been dropped out, if they formed part of the true text; whereas, on the other hand, it is said to be quite intelligible how, say about the beginning of the second century, such a prayer should have been inserted either from tradition or with reference to Ac 7⁶⁰. If Stephen prayed for his enemies, how much more likely that Jesus