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# VOICES OF THE SEA.

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# The Voices of the Sea.

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“THE SEA HATH SPOKEN.”—Isaiah, xxiii, 4.

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“To-day, my friends, begins the fourth year of my ministry among you. Three times has the earth made its annual journey of nearly six hundred million miles about the sun, while I have stood here Sunday after Sunday to deliver my weekly message. Great travelers, surely, have we been together in these three years, whirling through the vast of space at the rate of sixty-eight thousand miles every hour; and great truths ought we to have learned together in our travels, to shine like flashing diamonds in the golden setting of our daily lives. What magnificent pages of infinite wisdom have been lying ever open before our eyes! What glorious voices, uttering the secrets of infinite love, have been ever pouring their inspiration into our ears! Surely we must have been dull of sense and

sluggish of heart, if these three years, so crowded with divine tutions, have failed to enrich our being with spiritual treasures. So, at the threshold of this new year of my ministry, I have paused to interrogate my own experience; I have paused to put to myself the searching question: "What have I learned of God and of life?" For better than he has learned can no man teach.

Revolving in my own mind afresh the reason why I venture before you so frequently with a spoken word, I have been compelled to ask myself what is the burden and tenor of this word, what its purpose, what its worth. If I would not talk as the fool talks, aimlessly and emptily, I must have somewhat to say; and it is as well for the preacher as for the trader now and then to "take account of stock." In beginning thus a new year, I would come face to face with myself; and, as a highwayman stops a passenger with a stern "stand and deliver!" so would I challenge my own soul, and compel it to confess its profoundest faith. If there is any value whatever in this church, this pulpit, this ministry, what is the word I have to say to you—the message which justifies your gathering together and your patient listening?

Dear friends, I have long and anxiously pon-

dered this question in my heart; and I have come to this conclusion, that the justification of my preaching and of your listening, lies not so much in any particular word that I can utter, as in the fact that this weekly assemblage is a mutual confession, on your part and on mine, that human life, if not utterly shallow, must have a *religious interpretation*. I speak to you in the name and authority of no Church, no Scripture, no Messiah; I bring you only my own fallible thought and my own limited experience; yet you come and patiently listen, not because I am any wiser or any better than other men, but because our meeting here once a week is a perpetual reminder and recognition of great and eternal realities. The preaching, after all, is of small account; only one day in the week do I preach to you by word of mouth, while (a thought that fills me with concern) I cannot help preaching seven days in the week by my daily life among you. In fact, all of you are preaching to each other and to me daily sermons that are more audible than words; and even here on the Sunday, the pews are ever preaching more audibly than the pulpit. I repeat it, the justification of our weekly worship; its whole worth and influence, consists in its being a common and spontaneous expression of our faith in eter-

nal truths. You may dissent from what I say; yet if your consciousness of a Divine Law and a Divine Presence in all things becomes stronger because you are here, the end of my preaching is all accomplished. It is no aim of mine to bring you merely to *my way of thinking*; I am quite content if I bring you *to think for yourselves* earnestly and seriously, on the great problem of life and its duties. It would be impossible, therefore, for me to condense into any snug formula of words the end and object of my preaching; I seek only to keep before your minds and hearts the great truth that your lives should be lived, not merely in the world of practical pursuits, but also in the world of ideal aspirations and ennobling ideas.

As varied as life itself, then should my teachings be. Yet, fragmentary though they must be and are, one common spirit should run through them all, stimulating to more independent thought, sturdier fidelity to conscience, profounder remembrance and love of God. Unless your homes and hearts are at once holier and happier for the influence of these ministrations, unless you rest with a deeper acquiescence in the orderings of that Perfect Wisdom which folly only would wish to change, unless your whole lives are brought into a more perfect harmony with that bound-

less Love without which not a sparrow falls to the ground, then my words perish on the idle air, and it were better that I were dumb. What gain is there in your achieving clearer views of God's truth, if it fails to transfigure your characters with ideal beauty? Why should I seek to illuminate your understandings, if your hearts are no warmer, your spirits no purer, your lives no diviner than before? Believe me, I would make your thought freer and larger, that in this added freedom the power of eternal truth may more deeply penetrate into your souls, and build you up more perfectly into the divine life. It is nothing to me that you should think my thoughts, unless they lead you to a nobler and larger faith in the One to whom all thought points; and if, after candidly hearing the best I have to utter, you find the old truer to you than the new, my aim is wholly accomplished, provided the old acquires more beneficent influence over your lives in consequence of this reaffirmation. I seek not to make proselytes to my opinion, but to make more fearless disciples of infinite truth, more earnest workers for the good of mankind, more trustful and pure and loving children of the Heavenly Father. And my message to you week by week is the best utterance, enforcement, and illustration that I

can compass of this supreme object of all human living. To this end am I here in this pulpit; and because my heart is in the work, I love it daily more and more.

For two weeks past I have been dwelling beside the sea, and the best of preachers have I found it. Everlasting truths I have heard reverberating in the ceaseless thunder of its waves; and, instead of my poor voice, I would that you might even now be listening to that eloquence unapproachable. I can only speak to you to-day what the sea has been speaking to me. As I lay on the white sand of the beach, watched the grand advance of the surf as it curled upwards to its final plunge, and listened to its roar as it rushed towards me in sheets of foam, what cadence of voice could compare with these awful tones of God in nature? Surely, "The Sea hath spoken." More truly than my corporeal ear was filled with the noise of its inarticulate roaring, was my spiritual ear filled with the divine burden of its speech. And because, dear friends, I wish to give you ever the best and highest word that has come to me, and because in this grand oratory of the boundless ocean I have heard the audible voice of God, I will report in desultory fashion the substance of that sublime discourse. It is the best answer that I



can give to the question why I stand in t h place before you.

It is common to speak of "dead matter," "inanimate Nature." Such sayings are the ignorant babblings of a child. Nature is alive, and the last word of physical science is earnest testimony to its life. Throughout the boundless universe one mysterious Force presides, assuming countless Protean shapes, but ever remaining indestructible and the same. Science can at last demonstrate by balance and measure that all the physical phenomena of the universe manifest a single all-pervading cause. Not an atom exists but is moving in harmony with the universal life. Nature is alive, and its life is the life of God. The same Power that is the law of human destiny guides the stars in their courses, speeds the sunbeam through the vast abysses of space, shoots the lightning round the globe, governs the invisible play of chemical affinities, rolls the tides in the wake of the full-orbed moon, holds alike the atom and the constellation true to their functions in the sublime economy of the whole. All natural laws are simply diverse manifestations and modes of a a single infinite, omnipresent Force. Yes, that divine power which men vaguely conceive as somewhere exerted up in the skies, is round

about us in the solid earth we tread, in the air we breathe, in the green garments of the summer and the white vestments of the winter, in the very bodies of flesh, blood, and bone that obey our conscious wills. The activity of God we behold every moment of our lives in the changeless uniformities of Nature, to quarrel with which is to rebel against the wisdom they express. In that blue expanse of water which lies unbounded even by imagination before our eyes, and is alive all over with innumerable billows, we behold a visible manifestation of the omnipresent Mind, which invisibly, but no less really, reveals itself in the tossing ocean of human feeling and thought.

The Sea is a thing of life. Regular as the pulsations of the human heart, constant as the inhalations and exhalations of the human lungs, are the ceaseless motions of its waters; and, floating on its undulating surface, you are lapped in Eternal Being, and fondled by the Eternal Love. "God is not afar off in the invisible depths of the empyrean," preaches the solemn Sea; "He is here and now—behold and worship!" Amazing thought, that the mighty force impelling the vast host of breakers to dash upon the curving shore is the very same Power that rules the spiritual world, and governs alike the tempests and

the calms of human life. Let us quit the search for God—we cannot escape him if we would; we cannot open our eyes without beholding him; we cannot unseal our ears without hearing him; we cannot stir hand or foot without feeling him. In the stately periods of the eloquent Sea we hear eternal proclamation of the living God, the God that lives as truly in the shining spray that flashes with prismatic splendor, as in the soul of Jesus that illumines the page of history with a tender glow. Truly, “the Sea, hath spoken.”

Look out upon the seething surface of the great deep; what a maze of shifting lines, what bewilderment of forms passing endlessly into each other, what confusion worse confounded of waves rising and falling and chasing each other over the limitless expanse! Can the mind conceive a better type of absolute disorder than this vast labyrinth of billows? Yet this seeming type of lawlessness is really an instance, pre-eminent and astounding, of absolute harmony in apparent discord. Free as the waves may seem, they are controlled in every moment by unvarying law. Twice every day the waters rise and sink; the vast tidal waves, one on each side of the globe, follow the moon as faithfully as the flock follows the shepherd.

No disorder there; the laws that rule the

tides know no exception, and all is perfect harmony. And so the waves obey the winds though science cannot, as yet, formulate the law. Expect no break in the grand procession of the tides and waves; order, which the beholding eye cannot, even in its elements comprehend, is perfectly maintained from the beginning to the end.

Herein is God made manifest to the pondering soul. He is revealed in order, as no disorder could ever reveal him. The steady ongoings of nature and of life, disclose an ever-active intelligence, which the notion of miracle can but fatally obscure. God is law; therefore there is no luck, or chance, or fortuity in Nature. God is love; therefore there is no luck, or chance, or fortuity in Life. The changeless order of things is only ORGANIZED BENEFICENCE; and to inculcate distrust of it by preaching miracle, is simply to bring back chaos to men's minds. Let others rest their faith in the interruption of law. I rest mine in absolute immutability; for in that alone can I behold such a manifestation of Being, as is worthy of my intelligent adoration, my boundless confidence and worship. If the course of this changeless law, the preservation of this absolute order ever seems to conflict with my individual happiness, let me regard my

wild wishes as uninstructed folly, and instead of pouring out frantic prayers that the wise law of God may bend to my blind wilfulness, let me rather strive to discern the real benevolence of that law. If, at the core of all things there beats an infinite heart, love is the motive of law, and itself forbids the interruption of order for any fancied good of mine. In all the cares, wounds and griefs of life, at last Time shows me the outflow of a fathomless benignity, providing for me infinitely better than I can comprehend.

The experience of my life has taught me to feel no fear in the very Valley of the Shadow of Death, and to cry with David of old, "though Thou slay me, yet will I trust in Thee." The mighty sea before me, full of an orderly motion which God alone can comprehend, is a pledge to me that my life also is governed by the same Presiding Power, before which I stand untroubled and unafraid.

The bewildering march of the billows, tossing and leaping in a wantonness which to man is madness, but to God is method, becomes a symbol of human life, imaging by the ebb and flow of its tides, the sorrows and joy that succeed each other in every human experience. Oh for a profounder confidence that here, too, all is the wise method of encompassing Love, the ordain-

ings of a wisdom that controls our destiny with unerring skill and fathomless tenderness! "The Sea hath spoken," and heeding its tuition my conviction grows deep and strong, that we are forever embosomed in the omnipresent God.

One more lesson only from the preaching of the Sea, kindred, yet perhaps not precisely the same. I have spoken of the tides, how constantly and regularly they obey their law, and how order and harmony characterize their march around the globe.

But I have not dwelt on what I might call the motive of this regularity, the mighty attraction of the Moon. Visible or invisible, now a full, round sphere of silver, now gibbous, now a slender crescent, and now wholly dark—the Moon still finds the same faithful following from the Sea. Clouds and storms may hide it; the earth may eclipse it; the glare of day may swallow it up; yet unforgetfully the Sea yearns for it and untiringly pursues it. The beautiful orb in the heavens, changeful as it is to our human eyes, changes not at all in the power of its attraction, but down to the deepest depths moves the faithful Sea that loves it evermore. The mighty heart of the ocean throbs without pause in constant fealty and onward forever rolls the great tidal wave. What profound suggestions

do we find in this unswerving fidelity of the Sea! Whether to our feeble spiritual vision, God appears or disappears, whether he hides in the stormy night of sorrow or the dazzling day of joy, our hearts may yet glow with a love for him that shall make our actions true. Unlike the Sea, we are not constrained to follow him, or to live the god-like life against our wills; there is a margin left us for moral dereliction. But all the more beautiful becomes our voluntary allegiance and fidelity, and if we heed the lesson, the Sea will not have preached to us in vain. The grand, free virtue of a soul obeying because it loves, is the high worship that is worthy of humanity; and in this unforced, spontaneous tribute of faithful affection, is found a moral spectacle even more magnificent than the stately march of ocean tides.

Such, friends, has been the instruction of the Sea, which I have tried to rehearse to you afresh. The omnipresence of Infinite Power and Love, embracing us close as the air we move in—the absolute harmony and order of its working in the universe, and the inward repose that springs from a perception of this order—the divine beauty of a life which freely and comprehendingly obeys, because it loves, the perfect law of God—these great truths, preached to me so elo-

quently by the roar of the surf along the beach, what could I do but preach to you again in feeble human echoes of its strains? They are the grand burden of all my message from this desk; they can but clothe themselves in new forms and illustrations, remaining essentially the same; they are the power and the peace of God, if taken into our hearts and made the law of our lives. "The Sea hath spoken," and in its solemn speech are the audible voicings of that Infinite Life of which the entire universe we know is but a broken syllable. "Let us hear and heed."

Selected and Published by

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