

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

"And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God."

- Amos ix,13-15

John iii,18-end

#### Psalm 97

New Book of Worship, Psalm 104, pp.76, 77

This text is a parable of the Lord's kingdom. It relates to the Lord's new Church, the Holy City New Jerusalem now descending from God out of heaven.

In the Scriptures "days" mean states. Therefore the words "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord" foretell such a state of the Lord's Church on earth as is here described. The church is ever progressing to purer and nobler ideals. In the heavens this is apparent, and all that can be desired for human society on earth is that it be brought more and more into harmony with heavenly ideals and customs. For this the Lord taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so also upon the earth."

At first it is predicted that "the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed." By this is meant, in the language of the writings, "the conjunction of spiritual good with its truth and of spiritual truth with its good" (A.C.5117), or in other words that he that receives good and truth shall also perform uses, that is that the man of the Church shall receive good and truth and perform uses at the same time. The plowman represents preparation for the reception and application of truth, and the reaper denotes a gathering of truths. Putting these together the teaching is that as soon as there is a gathering of truths there should be a readiness to apply them to life. This same is suggested in the treader of grapes, which refers to the acquisition of spiritual truth, and the sower of seed which denotes those who instruct and apply truth to the life. Hence the thought is that so far as one acquires faith, he is eager to live according to it and to teach it.

Such is the proper relation between learning and doing, and such the haste to convert creed into deed. This implies two things: first, the downfall of faith alone, and instead the raising up of the teaching that all religion has relation to life and that a religious life consists in doing good.

The making haste to practice what one knows implies another thing: the

presence and power of heavenly influences. "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." This means that we ourselves are not sources of anything, that we only make use of and modify what we receive from outside of ourselves. This is true of us physically, for without food and drink our bodies wither and die. Men and women are proud of their strength and beauty, though they are not the source of them. We may do a little to preserve these, but we are not producers of them. And so it is with all of our gifts and talents which are means of usefulness or enjoyment; we cannot make them. We can learn to use those that have been given us, but there is nothing of them that we produce. We put seed into the ground, water and tend it, but we do not produce the harvest; we do not even produce the seed, or any of the materials that nourish it.

It may be thought that the ideas according to which work is done are genuine productions of human minds. But ideas are based on facts, and we no more produce such facts and knowledges than we produce the materials of which we build. The faculty of producing is not given to us. It cannot be, for there can be only one originator. In the verses of our text the need of constant nourishment in order that one may do or be anything at all is given in order to mark the folly of one who looks to himself instead of looking to Him who made him and upon whom he constantly depends for support.

As man looks to the Lord, his nature is transformed and renewed and brought into accord with the spirit and laws of angelic society, so that heavenly light and love can inflow. In this way men and women become responsive to truth, and bring it forth in acts of kindly service.

To what extent this type of Christian character exists in the Lord's Church now we may not be able to ascertain, yet we may be assured that in this new day which is beginning, wherein the Son of man is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, the number in whom the plowman overtakes the reaper and the treader of grapes the sower of seed is steadily on the increase.

The second promise of the text is: "The mountains shall drop new wine, and all the hills shall melt." This is interpreted to mean "that from the good of love to the Lord and from the good of charity towards the neighbor, there shall be truths in abundance" (A.E.376). A mountain suggests the highest affection of the soul, which is love to the Lord. This love consists in a sincere desire to keep the Lord's commandments, to do His will. The resolve to keep the Lord's word is repentance, which is the beginning of wisdom, of heavenly life. From this ruling love there is begotten another which is symbolized by a hill. It is the desire to be just and kind to the neighbor. Where there is the mountain of love to the Lord there will also be the hill of charity. For the mountains to drop down new wine is to have an abundance of spiritual truth from love to the Lord, and for the hills to melt is to derive from love to the neighbor an abundance of moral and civil truth. The Scriptures are very exact. This is what the Lord meant when He said "He that followeth me...shall have the light of life."

Certainly the Church should from love to the Lord have an abundance of spiritual truth, and from the hills of charity plenteous streams of moral truth. The Lord through the prophet Joel foretold the same precious experience in these words: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters."

The third promise of the text is: "And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them." This promise embraces four particulars.

First, Israel shall return from her captivity. By this is meant that the Church shall be restored from spiritual captivity to the evil and false. "They are said to be in spiritual captivity who are held as to the interiors by the Lord in good and truth, but as to the exteriors by hell in the evil and the false... In this case they are held as it were, captive, for by influx from the Lord they are willing to be in good and truth, but by afflux from the hells they seem to themselves not to be able" (A.C.7990). The church which the Lord established by His Apostles, after a brief period of purity and triumph was spread abroad into Europe, Asia, and Africa, where it fell into captivity. The heresies and corruptions of which history gives so sad a record show how fully the Lord's prophecies came true. It means much, therefore, when it is promised that the Church shall be recovered from its captivity.

Second, "And they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them" means that there shall be a reconstruction of Christian doctrine, and an application of it to life. By cities are meant doctrines and by a waste what has been destroyed, by build to reconstruct, and by inhabit to make a part of life. Thus there will be a change in the interior character of the Church, opening her to more direct inflow of heavenly light and love. The Church today is in transition, but the Church has not been left without chart and compass. The new truths, founded on the firm basis of Scripture and reason, have been given to the Church by the Lord Himself. They are making their way into all branches of the Church, and into all departments of human thought.

Third, it is promised: "They shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof." By this is meant that the members of the Church will be instructed in genuine truths, and thereby will gain heavenly intelligence.

And lastly it is declared: "They shall plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them." By this it is meant that the Church will cultivate intelligence from which she will gain wisdom, that is a life of usefulness, "for wisdom comes when truths are committed to life" (A.E.376).

So the final promise continues: "And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." This means that the Church will become established in heavenly truth and goodness, and will never again become captive to falsities and evils, but will increase in light and love and fruitfulness to eternity.

So to John on Patmos the Lord said concerning the New Jerusalem: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever." Amen