

The Final Consolation

By Robert Roberts

I suggest a final consolation. It is one that God himself has given us in the word of His promise. It is a picture, but not a fancy. It is beautiful, but not a fable. It is ravishing to the imagination, and yet the presentment of truth as practical and actual and tangible as any sight to be seen at any time in the humdrum streets of a modern city. It comes direct to us on the guarantee of Him who holds heaven and earth in His hand—who, having cursed, can bless: who, having smitten, can heal; who, having caused us to know the misery of His withdrawn countenance from the earth, and the consequent prevalence of disorder and death, can gladden our eyes by the spectacle of the tabernacle of God with men, and human life a beautiful and holy and joyful thing for ever.

Come to the land of promise in the day of its glory—not as you are now—burdened with infirmity, with a nature easily fatigued, eye soon dimmed, power soon spent, and having but scant capacity to rise to the surrounding sublimities of the universe, or to apprehend sympathetically the subtle glories of the Spirit. Come, when it has been said to you, as to Joshua, “Take away the filthy garments from him ... I will clothe thee with a change of raiment.” Come when mortality no longer weighs you to the earth, and when you know the new experience of having “the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Come when you can step lightly and joyously abroad upon the earth in the freedom and power of spirit nature; when the cup of life mantles full and sparkling to the brim; when the strong, penetrating eye looks out of a glad heart to behold in all things the unfolded love, and wisdom, and glory of God: when every thought is a joy, every movement a pleasure: every breath the inspiration of an ecstasy that can only find fit expression in praise to Him that sits upon the throne.

In such a state, any land, any configuration of country, would furnish suitable sphere. But God puts his jewels in fit settings. He hath called and glorified His children, and “He hath prepared for them a city”—a city having foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Abraham sojourned in the geographical area of this city—in the land of promise—as in a strange country; but that is now long past. Forsaken and hated for ages, the land is now “an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.” God has fulfilled His promise and has made “her wilderness like Eden—her desert like the garden of the Lord.”

“Come and see.” We go: We stand on the hills of Judea, now no longer stern and wild. They are clad with glorious vegetation, of every form and fragrance. The hills are clothed with pleasant woods, and the valleys rejoice in the smiling beauties of a rich cultivation—field and vineyard, fruits and flowers, corn, and wine. The air is clear and warm, and laden with pleasant odour. The view on all sides is magnificent and far-reaching. No smoke obscures the landscape, no fog on the valleys, no mist on the hills. The sky is cloudless, and the sun pours his healing flood of light on rejoicing land and ocean. The whirr of pleasant insect; the musical song of bird helps the sense of gladness that fills the air. Near are pleasant homesteads, standing each in its own plot or portion, neatly trimmed, well kept. Below in the valley, towns, and hamlets, peopled by righteous Israelites, are visible in the far receding distance, clearly visible in this transparent

atmosphere, in which everything appears nearer than it is. Jerusalem is faintly visible on our northern horizon.

Let us hasten in that direction. This is only the profane portion of the land—a scene of peace and righteousness and plenty, truly, but not comparable to “the holy portion of the land.” Come to the holy portion of the land—the land given as an oblation to the Lord. We approach Jerusalem, or rather Yahweh Shammah (the new name of the new city) from the south. It stands in the southernmost section of the holy portion. It is an immense city, built upon a plan of perfect symmetry and proportion. It is very unlike the huddled clusters of human dwellings called towns with which we have been familiar. The general plan is an exact square, marked by an outer wall. The square is of enormous extent, measuring nine miles through at any point. The wall is of bright stone, and adorned with towers at regular distances. We only see the south wall. It stretches away right and left further than the eye can follow. It is over nine miles long on the south side, and on all the other sides the same. There are lofty ornamental gates at regular distances. We descend from the overlooking hill and enter by one of these gates. It would be pleasant to stay and inspect the city; but we want to hurry on to the temple, and, therefore we must be content with a rapid passage through the central thoroughfare, which we have chosen, to the northern exit by one of the gates in the north wall. Just before passing on, we notice at a glance the stately character of the city. The streets are straight and wide, and shaded with trees, and, at regular distances, open out into squares and crescents. The houses are not high and stand apart in gardens except where here and there palatial blocks of buildings spring from the midst of the squares. We ask what these are, and are informed that they are reception-houses, for the accommodation of the visitors who daily come from all parts.

There is an immense number of the people in the city, but the city is so vast that they do not appear numerous, except at certain points, as we pass along. Their aspect is such as we never saw in any city crowd before—so quiet, yet so cheerful; so brightly interested in everything, yet so orderly and respectful; so apparently cultured and well-to-do, yet having none of the fussiness and arrogance usually associated with prosperity. All are well clad, cleanly, intelligent, good, righteous, and happy—no boisterous merrymaking—no foolish banter—no unseemly utterance. They are a few of the happy subjects of the kingdom of God. They have come from all parts of the earth to do homage to the king—wives and families with them, leaving behind them prosperous homesteads and occupations, to which they will return in a little season.

We hasten in a straight line along our nine-mile avenue of picturesque and happy human habitation—(we could take the help of an electric tram, if we liked: for such has been provided in all the thoroughfares, for the use of the people: but, in our new state, we prefer to walk: we can quicken our pace, when we want to do so, by gliding along in the air, skimming the surface of the road, as we dreamt of in our mortal days). We get out at the gate of Judah: opposite which, after crossing an ornamental common of about half a mile in breadth that runs round the entire city, there opens a magnificent highway running in a straight line in a northern direction towards the temple which is distant about thirty miles.

Along this highway we proceed. It is very broad, and of noble aspect. A line of tall trees in a broad band of turf divides it in the centre, and again in the middle of each side, giving four spacious roadways running side by side, lined with trees and bordered with turf and flowers.

The country on each side is laid out in fields and estates, which are in the occupation of the Levites of the second order who serve the temple, whose lands, however, are accessible to visitors

at all times. The country becomes more magnificent at every step. At certain points, side roads strike off and return in many turnings and windings to the main road again. These side roads lead through woody solitudes of paradisaic beauty.

Let us go down one of these roads and behold the fulfilment of the promise that Yahweh would make the place of his feet glorious. All is quiet, comforting, and beautiful. There is no dankness, but only a sense of bracing relief in the shade they give: no wetness on the ground, but only a pleasant soft hardness. There are no walls or fences at the side of the road. You may walk straight off the road on to velvet turf under the trees and among the shrubs. Here you find all kinds of fruit growing—all kinds of flowers in bloom. You are at liberty to put forth your hand and do as you will. How delicious the odour everywhere! We stroll and stroll. We come upon a break in the wood where the ground descends into a gorge. We see clear out to the side of an opposite hill. A brook murmurs past where we stand. The sun streams over all. What a delicious hush! What a sense of joy in every fibre of being. We enjoy the scene for a few moments when hark! there is a burst of music! It comes rolling towards us from the top of the opposite hill. What is it? A brass band? No! we have heard the last of them. It is a mixture of voices and instruments—stringed instruments. How beautiful! The voices so musical, so full and correct—the instruments so adapted to the voices. There must be at least a hundred people. It is beautiful! it is ravishing! We stand and listen. We do not know the piece, yet it seems familiar. It is a psalm of praise to God. We hear it out, and then all falls quiet. We would like to make the acquaintance of the company. We direct our steps towards the top of the hill. Going along an upward leading path, we see people coming towards us. As we go forward, we approach them. They look enquiringly and smilingly at us: we look enquiringly and smilingly at them. We are not in the least embarrassed: only we were silent. Then the foremost of their company—a fresh elderly man of noble look—so majestic, yet so friendly—with such exquisite tenderness of manner, and yet such kingliness of carriage, broke the silence. He spoke in Hebrew, but we seemed to understand it quite naturally.

He says, “You are friends, I know.”

We say, “We are.”

“Friends of God?”

“Praise God, yes.”

“You have come in a happy time—the time to favour of Zion.”

“Yes, it is a time we have long waited for.”

“So have we all. God’s word is sure and has come to pass.”

“Whither hale ye from?”

“Britain.”

“Oh—Britain—Tarshish—yes; the most celebrated of the isles of the Gentiles. God has made great use of her in bringing about Israel’s deliverance. We have just been indulging in a psalm on the subject.”

“Yes, we heard you; we were greatly delighted. We should like to hear it again.”

“Should you? Well, there is nothing to hinder. There is an open space at the foot of this gorge where it would be convenient.”

We cannot express the indefinable pleasure we felt, as we walked together down the hillside towards the spot indicated.

As we walked, we said, “Might we be so bold as to ask who your company are?”

“They are a small band of the Lord’s people, settled now in these parts, who have come out for an evening stroll. You ought to know who we are.—You look as if you belonged to the Lord’s people yourselves.”

“Well, in truth, we do; and we instinctively felt that you were a company of the saints—the immortal saints. Yet we felt fain not to presume on this our first visit to this most blessed realm.”

“Have you been among the dead, then, my friends?”

“No: we belong to the current generation. We were alive at the coming of the Lord.”

“Ah! you have been favoured not to see corruption.”

“We do not feel it has been a greater favour than that enjoyed by those who, by a momentary wink as it were, escaped from the vanity of human life, as it was in the Lord’s absence, into the glory revealed at his return.”

“Well, there is something to be said on that score. For one, I should not have liked to live all the days that divided my mortal life from the resurrection.”

“How long might the interval have been?”

“Nigh three thousand years.”

“Whom may we have the honour of speaking to?”

The old man (looking so young in his hoary hairs) paused. Those near him who had gathered close to us, and were eagerly enjoying our conversation, said, “Who do you think?”

We looked enquiringly.

“Guess?”

“We cannot.”

“Who wrote most of the Psalms?”

We bowed with unspeakable pleasure. “King David? oh happy day!”

Our majestic interlocutor said, “Even so: a morning without clouds, as the Lord promised.”

Arrived at the bottom of the glade, we stood together and sang the anthem we had heard them sing on the top of the hill—David leading. Oh, such voices! Oh, such blending of liquid melodies! Oh, such fervent pouring of the soul into the meaning of the words. The delight was unutterable. Preparing to resume the journey, we are asked whither bound.

“The temple.”

“Not to-night?”

“We had thought of it.”

“Put it off till to-morrow. Come with us. We spend the night at Abraham’s palace. There we shall introduce you to a number of friends.”

The proposal is overpoweringly good. But we are not embarrassed. We would have been so in the old mortal. In the new man to which we have attained, we are simply at home in a perfect satisfaction. We express our pure pleasure at the prospect, and start off with our company, numbering about 200 persons—men and women—all so lovely to look at and so bright to talk to. We find they comprise Jonathan, Asaph, Nathan, Uriah, Bathsheba, and a number who were David’s intimates in the days of his flesh. Others we did not know. We ascertained that they formed David’s personal circle in the new order of things.

Abraham’s palace to which we were bent was some distance off. It stood within seven miles of the temple, and we were still 20 miles away. There was need for speed, as the softening light warned us of the approach of the shades of evening. So, at a signal from our leader, we resorted to the angelic mode of locomotion, and by a simple act of the will, were able to propel ourselves through the air by a slight motion of the limbs at a short distance from the ground. We went at a rapid pace, but it was not at all fatiguing, and there was no sense of chill from rushing through the air. On the contrary, it was a delightful exercise. We seemed to get along like a company on very fleet bicycles, but without their violent contortions.

The air was balmy: and our progress through it only seemed to give us a higher sense of its exhilarating power, and bring out more distinctly the sweetness of the odours exhaling from the paradisaic vegetation clothing hill and dale.

In an hour’s time we arrive at Abraham’s palace—a magnificent pile, standing in a wooded seclusion. He has evidently a large company at home. They are waiting us expectantly. We are announced while yet a good way off, and they all come out on the balconies and corridors in front of the spacious building and salute us as we pass within the grounds in front. Ornamental tables are arranged for a repast. There is a pleasant mingling on the green sward—much brilliant talking and silvery laughter—everyone so bright and well. Then they all sit down—about 600 people. A venerable figure rises—not bent or aged, but noble in the air of ripe maturity—hair and flowing beard of pure white: a countenance full of gravity and kindly repose, but having no sign of weakness. He calls upon every glorified son and daughter of the Lord God Almighty to give thanks to the Possessor of Heaven and earth for the overflowing bounty of His goodness in Christ Jesus. In few meet and sonorous words, he presents the offering of thanksgiving. Then the other kingly old man stands also and says, “It is a good and a pleasant thing to give thanks to the Lord...”

“Let us praise the Lord!” and the whole company rise with a readiness that seems like an elastic bound, and all eyes on David, who raises his hand to lead, they break forth into a psalm with such fervour of shout, such emphatic enunciation of words, and such beauty of musical utterance, that the mere exercise seems to rouse them into a fresh glow of the heavenly ardour that is normal with them all. They then sit down and partake of grapes and various fruits. There are cooked dishes of various kinds for those who prefer. All is partaken of with perfect gastronomic gusto.

There is much pleasant talk and interchange of animated glances between persons at different parts of the table. All eat heartily, but not heavily. There are no heavinesses or indigestions afterwards. It is not possible. The food partaken of becomes the subject of a slow, spiritual combustion, which assimilates every atom of it to the energy of the spiritual body: and the process of this combustion is a source of pleasure to the eaters.

The repast finished, there is a breaking up of the company into groups, and an indiscriminate commingling, affording the opportunity of private snatches of conversation with any who may choose. In this way, we approach Abraham, who stands in the centre of a group, conversing in a deliberate, cordial, but stately manner. We listen, and do not presume to take part, though having many questions we would like to put. We know there will be plenty of time afterwards.

After two hours spent in this way, we unite in another song, after which we are all shown to separate apartments for the night. We were not tired. We had no inclination to go to sleep. We felt quite as bright as mortals usually do in the morning, and a little brighter, I fancy. Still, it was an acceptable change to enter a cool, lightly constructed, pleasant chamber, with slight and elegant furnishings, to spend the night alone. There was no darkness. There was a glorious moon overhead, showing a brightness rarely visible in western countries. The chamber was lit electrically: and, in addition to this, we felt a light in ourselves that made us feel as if darkness could not be. The night quickly passed: sometimes we paced the room in reflection: sometimes reclined on the top of an elegant couch (no need for getting under the clothes): sometimes got up and read, and sometimes sang. When morning arrived, the sun poured her golden flood in at the windows, and we were ready for a new day without any sense of fatigue such as we should have been sure to experience after such a night in mortal days.

Looking out at the windows, the eye took in a noble stretch of country, lying away behind the beautiful grounds of the palace, just in front. The country descended towards the Jordan in the distance, beyond which rose a rampart of purple hills running north and south. To the right and left, in the near neighbourhood of the palace, were distinctly marked spurs of the ridge on which the palace itself stood, covered with wood. It was a picture of seclusion and peace in the morning brightness and the balmy air, yet there was no loneliness. Pleasant sounds and the occasional sight of a visitor stepping out to enjoy the scene, reminded us that we were in the habitation of intelligence and love—in one of the abiding places of the Father’s house now set up on earth.

Descending to a great hall on the ground floor, we found a large company mustered, joyous, bright, and gay. I observed there was none of the quiet fatigue that mortals experience after an evening’s social exercitation such as we had had. All were fresh and lively. Exchanging hearty greeting with those next us, we sat down and waited the progress of events, our uppermost desire being an early departure to see the temple.

Shortly, a psalm was proposed, in which all took part in the effective manner of the previous evening. Then the God of Abraham was addressed by Abraham, the father of us all, in simple, earnest words, that took us all with him to the throne of the Eternal. Shortly after we had sat down, we were summoned to another room for the morning meal. Out we thronged in pleasant crowds, and were conducted to a large banquetting hall, with sky-light dome roof and walls largely constructed of glass, on which vines were trained and adorned with various ornamental plants. Bright tables occupying the hall from end to end groaned under the load of all good things, interspersed with flowers. Abraham called on David, who gave thanks with a fervour that thrilled us all and evoked a loud “Amen” from every mouth. (We asked if Isaac and Jacob were present, and were told they were not; that they had palaces of their own not a great distance away, and that though frequent visitors, they had more often to act the part of host to the numbers that came to see them from all parts. We might see them in the course of the day at the Temple, as there was to be a special gathering of all the saints.

“Shall we see Moses?”

“Very likely; he is always prominent on such occasions.”

“And the prophet like unto Moses?”

“We are nothing without Him. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

We felt almost overpowered at the prospect of seeing the Lord Jesus in all his glory.

Breakfast being over, we discovered there would be no delay in getting our desire gratified. The whole company were shortly ready, and on the road that lay in the direction of the Temple, going south and west from Abraham’s palace. The road lay through a mountainous district, exuberant with the choicest vegetation, and the morning air was rich with the odour of flowers.

We were not long in accomplishing the distance at a moderate walk. The intercourse we enjoyed with first one and then another in that superb company would have quickly whiled away a desert journey. What was its goodness in the holy ground of Zion, whom the Lord had comforted, as it is written “He will make the wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord?” Truly joy and gladness were found therein—thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

At last, the Temple burst upon our view, as we rounded the corner of a hill on which we stood at a considerable elevation. How shall I describe it? It was about a mile off from where we stood. It looked like a square-set, symmetrical city of palaces. It was not what we have always understood by a temple: that is, it was not a building, an edifice, however large, but an immense open structure of light and airy parts, all of enormous size, yet all resembling one another, and covering such an area that they did not look so large as they were. What we saw from where we stood was, of course, the outer wall; but it was a very different thing from what is suggested to us by a wall. It was in reality a long line of arches standing upon a solid basement, and stretched from east to west for a distance of over a mile. There must have been nearly 200 arches in the line. Between every dozen arches or so was an entrance gate, towering considerably above the arches; and at each end of the line was an enormous tower, giving a well-marked finish to the wall. We could see inside through the arches, but what we saw seemed simply like a forest of palace-like structures, with a hill top shooting through the centre, and crowned with what looked

like a shrine.—We advanced towards the splendid structure—the tabernacle of the Most High—the place of the soles of his feet where he dwells in the midst of the children of Israel forever.

Shortly, we came upon a bridgeless stream of crystal water that came flowing from under the house, and ran due east towards the Dead Sea, flanked with trees along its banks. This we crossed. You have seen boys jumping a stream. It was a very different performance from this. We simply, with a graceful movement, passed gently through the air from one bank to the other. We were now near “the house,” and saw of what an immense size the arches were—about 120 feet high. Though open arches, they were latticed, and plants which looked like vines were trained among the lattice work.

We entered by one of the gates, and found ourselves in the first court, open to the air. Here were thousands upon thousands of people who had come for the special day mentioned at the breakfast table. It struck me as peculiar that the country we had come through was so lacking of people in view of this multitude. It was explained to me that the public access to the temple was from the south only, by the highway we had traversed the day before, and that the land to the north, and east, and west, of the temple was private to those who had to do with the service of the temple. As we passed in, the people made an avenue, and bowed themselves in sincere reverence to a company of the Sons of God. Crossing the outer court (a breadth of 200 feet), we entered a gate of the inner range of arch-building, which resembled the outer wall, but stood a little higher; passing through, we were in the inner court, of similar dimensions to the outer court (also open to the sky). Before us, about 200 feet further on, stood the temple proper—not a square building, but an immense circle of arch building, three miles in circumference. This circle of building filled the whole view from right to left, gradually diminishing with the distance. We entered this circle by the gate opposite us, and passing through the building, found ourselves inside the inner and holiest precincts of the house, viz., an immense circle nearly a mile across, open to the sky. The floor of this circle was the ground, not flat, however, but rising gradually on all sides to the centre, where there was a walled enclosure, about 200 feet square, containing the great altar.

At the time of our arrival, this interior space was nearly empty; but by-and-bye, companies like our own began to arrive from all sides of the circle. As they arrived, they entered the circle, and took up a position which apparently had been assigned beforehand; for servitors, who were in charge, all round the building, escorted the new arrivals to their places. These servitors were graceful, pleasant-mannered, agile, well-formed, young-men, in loose robes. (One of our company whispered to me they were angels.) As the time wore on, the arrivals became more numerous, until there was one continual stream from all sides. There was on all hands, a pleasant hum, as of a multitude conversing. Presently, the circle was full, and the inflow ceased. Quiet and order settled down. The assembly presented an imposing appearance, packed together in a picturesque and living mass far as the eye could reach. The prevailing costume was simple—white with gold fixings. I had not asked who they were. I instinctively felt they were the assembled body of Christ; and my rapturous interest in them was only held in check by the greater thought that Christ was presently to be introduced to them.

Where was he? I asked my companion. He was not yet arrived. His palace was some thirty miles off in a straight line east of the temple, standing in the paradisaic glories of “the prince’s portion,” overlooking the Jordan valley. The prince’s portion was an extensive tract of country flanking the temple district, east and west. In both portions, the prince was surrounded by special friends, to whom he had assigned seats of residence and honour. The portion to the west

was a seaboard, looking out on the Mediterranean, where also the prince had a palace; but on state occasions, his arrival was from the palace on the east.

This I learned in the interval while we were waiting. Presently a hush fell on the assembly: then a brightness seemed to break out simultaneously from all parts of it as if hidden electric foot-lights had been suddenly turned on all over the building. Every face glowed with light: every garment became lustrous and shining. It was not an oppressive brightness, but an atmosphere of subdued light and warmth that seemed to diffuse a sense of unspeakable comfort and joy.

In a few moments more, the air over our heads became alive with light and life. A multitude of the heavenly host became visible: the brightness grew to glory: there was a quivering excitement of rapturous expectation: a sound as of trees swayed by the wind; a movement at the eastern entrance, and, lo, a dazzling figure, escorted right and left by a shining phalanx, emerged into view. Instantly, the angelic host overhead broke into acclamation, in which the whole assembled multitude joined. It was nothing like the “applause” to be heard in mortal assemblies. There was all the abandon with it that is ever manifested at the most enthusiastic public meeting, but there was with this, a gentle fervour and musical cadence that seemed to send waves of thrilling sweetness to the remotest corner.

The Lord Jesus advanced to the midst of the assembly. All eyes were on him, his demeanour was royal, yet simple and loving. He paused; there was silence. Then he lifted his eyes and looked gravely round, not all round; and in a voice that was gentle, kind, strong and exultant all in one, in tones rich, but not strong, and yet as distinctly audible as if spoken in a small room to one person, he said, “I have been to my Father and your Father. It was needful that I should go away; but I have come again as I said, in the glory of my Father and his holy angels. Ye have had sorrow; but now ye rejoice, and your joy no man any more taketh from you. It is written, In the midst of my brethren will I sing praise. Now, praise our God, all ye his servants.”

Then he ceased: an electric spasm of joy seemed to pass through the assembly. There was a rustle, and a preparation, and a fixing of attention on Christ. He lifted his hand, and as if by an inspiration, the whole assembly took the lead from him, and broke into a transport of tumultuous and glorious sound. Every energy was strained to the utmost. Mortal nerves could not have stood it; but the assembly of the immortals seemed to revel and gather increasing strength with every higher and higher effort of musical strain. “Blessing and honour and glory be unto him that sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever.—Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and honour and glory, and blessing.—Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, and hast made us unto our God, kings and priests, and we shall reign with thee upon the earth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of Our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Amen.”

It would be possible to speak of the dispersal of the assembly (to meet again at fixed and regular times); and of the intercourse in private afterwards; the delightful identification of this one and that—Joseph, Moses, Isaiah, Paul; of the visits to first one palace and then another throughout all the holy portion of the land; and of the arrangements for departure of this saint and that to distant parts of the world, to lead and govern mankind. But let this glimpse suffice of a glory that is certain to be revealed in due time, and which, when it comes, will remain forever.

Hoping and praying to be permitted, with you, to occupy even the least place in the Kingdom of God, when the sufferings of this present time shall have wrought in us their appointed work, let me write myself once more,

Your fellow-sojourner and servant,

In the joy of faith and the patience of hope through our Lord Jesus Christ,

ROBERT ROBERTS