

M A Z Z I N I :

A DISCOURSE GIVEN IN SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL,
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BY

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MAZZINI.

I SHALL make no apology for postponing the subject which I had announced for this morning. Death has assigned another theme—bade me stand aside, and let the life of the great heart whose pulses it had stilled utter our lesson for to-day.

MAZZINI is dead—the bravest and the purest man that walked in Europe! Still now is the brain ever busy with the interests of Humanity; the hands so warm to the friends, so terrible to the enemies of mankind, are folded on the breast. The white column that stood amid the intrigues and corruptions of Europe—a landmark in the desert—has—shall I say fallen? Nay, only the remnant of the physical scaffolding amid which it rose has fallen; the life there built up rises above the spot where he fell, beside Pisa's leaning tower, more straight and shining than before—a tower that did not lean, but amid the bending and cringing stood erect and true to the last.

I claim, with a satisfaction which I hope is not undue, that there is no place in which this man may be more fitly honoured than that in which we are gathered. MAZZINI was a believer in the one supreme

Father of Mankind, Inspirer of the Universe—in the inviolable order of nature—in an ideal Humanity, whose witness and martyr he beheld in the crucified prophet of Nazareth, on whom he looked from a cross of his own. His religious reason was as a glowing sky, under which he habitually lived and adored. It has been my high privilege to meet him often, but never without reflecting, “This is the most religious man I ever knew !” The belief in God, which, under its new name, Theism, has begun already to signify a dogmatic distinction, with him was a conviction too profound to be expressed in anything less than a consecrated life ; and his life was Duty organised. It is easy to utter praises and prayers to God, who does not need them : not so easy to serve Humanity, which needs service. He whose sublimely simple creed was, “God and the People,” did not transfer it from the living heart to a dead symbol ; he pressed it to his breast till it became the essence of his nature, flowed in his blood, expressed itself in every thought, word, act—nay, moulded itself into the very eye-beam, voice, and physiognomy of the man. If I say this is a fit place to do homage to him, it is not because of any pride in our attainments ; it is because from the day that the foundations of this Society were laid it has aimed to uphold and aspire to that ideal of a creed expressed in character—a faith written in fidelity, of which MAZZINI’s life was the type and is the monument.

I am aware that this which I have stated is not the general theory of the man. There is a police theory of him, which is perhaps more universal. Happily

but few English papers have uttered over the patriot's grave the exploded inventions of tyrants and their tools—tyrants and tools who have either sunk into dishonoured graves, or who move amid the detestation of honest men. Shall we disprove the charge that Mazzini was an assassin? I might as well stop to prove that a lily is not nightshade. Time has shown in their true character those who made such charges. Miserable self-seeking Kings of Italy, their hands reeking with the best blood of their country, have accused him of murder. The shameless assassin of liberty and of peoples, who mounted his country's throne as a murderer, and escaped from the ruin he had brought on it as a coward, propagated such slanders in this country, which his presence now pollutes. The King of Italy lives to hear his own Assembly answer his calumnies by a tribute to the friend of the People. The degraded oppressor of France has read in the organs of the party which chiefly sustained him in England honourable estimates of the man he most dreaded. Time has shown who were the assassins. And yet, after particular falsehoods have perished, theories based on them sometimes linger. Unhappily it became necessary, twice in the life of this man, that eminent politicians of this country should try and blacken his name for personal and political objects. Once, twenty-eight years ago, when a Government had lent itself to be the police-agent of the Continent in opening MAZZINI'S letters, it could only meet honest English indignation by repeating charges it had to retract, but which still influenced certain minds.

Again, eight years ago, when a statesman was hunted by partisans from a Government he now adorns, at the bidding of the French Emperor, simply because of his friendship for the great Italian, the tyrant's opinion of the patriot was echoed again, and another page of English history sullied.

Therefore, one is hardly surprised that absurd estimates should still exist concerning MAZZINI. We have heard it alleged that he was a conspirator. He was a conspirator: he and his brave comrades conspired day and night how they might foil the foes of their country, how they might defeat the enemies of mankind. While others slept, ate, drank, made merry, these aching brows took counsel together how they might bring back peace, justice, religion, to their broken and bleeding country. Tyrants have an evil name for such conspiring of true-hearted men, but in the end truth triumphs over words. A hundred years ago, when America was still chained, the people of Boston used to meet by night in their shipyards to consult for their liberation; the agents of the king called them meetings of caulkers,—that is, the caulkers of ships,—and the word became equivalent to conspirators. But now when the Americans assemble for any national purpose, the convention is called a "Caucus." The day will come when the conspirator of to-day will be named with equal honour as one who through the weary night watched and toiled for his country's dayspring.

Then, MAZZINI is called a revolutionist. This too he was in the same sense. It is difficult for American and

English people of the present day to weigh justly the revolutionist of Italy. Our revolutions have passed. Our Charles Alberts, and Victor Emmanuels, and Napoleons belong to ancient history. England killed them, overthrew them, built her freedom on the ruins of their thrones. The English people—rejoicing in charters of liberty whose every line is written in blood—may now complacently rebuke those who are passing through that old phase for following their example. But our Saxon testimony stands—"Resistance to tyrants is service to God;" and stand it will till the last throne of wrong shall fall.

These charges, urged against the man whom for nearly half a century oppressors most dreaded, need only be looked at steadfastly to be recognised as thin veils which the ignoble have tried to draw over his nobility. It is just such accusations that point us to his truth and his devotion. The keenness and pertinacity of the pursuit attested the patient devotion of the man. He could not be bribed, he could not be turned aside. Prisons could not change him. But what did all this mean for him who has found repose for the first time in the grave? It meant that this life was one continued offering to the Ideal which had called it.

Behold him as a boy, of high social position, well educated, with every fair prospect opening before him. His father proud of his son's gifts, his mother full of high hopes, have never trained him to consider the woes and wrongs of his country. But one day his higher mother meets him; it is mourning Italy

who points to the poor soldiers of her cause who have been beaten back, choked with dust and blood. Silent, wondering, stricken to the heart, the boy gazes at the men as they wander about the streets of Genoa, and thenceforth all the bright prospects of a brilliant career fade away. The young eyes can see only the sorrow and the hope of Italy. He had already developed a fine literary taste, he was by nature a philosophical thinker ; but on these, and all the many worldly interests which beckoned him, he turned his back, and took the appealing hand of Liberty, who for her dower could only offer him hatred, poverty, the prison.

And now behold him torn from his parents by night, hurried he knows not whither, doomed to pass weary days in a prison looking forth upon the sea and the sky, at that period of life when youth is fullest of eagerness to enter into life. Why is he treated thus as a felon ? The Governor of Genoa told his father why it was. He said, "He is a young man of talent, very fond of solitary walks by night, and habitually silent as to the subject of his meditations; and the Government is not fond of young men of talent, the subject of whose musings is unknown to it." That is a sufficient justification of MAZZINI'S life. The Italy which he confronted was one which had nothing better to do for its young thinkers than to imprison them.

To sacrifice the prospect of a brilliant forensic career—being, as he was, a born orator—to abandon the still more alluring attractions of literature, in which he had already gained successes, were not the

severest sacrifices to which he was called. Only those who knew him can estimate how much more severe it was to so tender a nature to give pain to those who loved him, to untwine the arms of affection which would have withheld him from his task ; to see the companions of his earliest years turn back with averted faces ; to see friend after friend fall away. What were prisons to this ? But he will form new ties, will find nobler friends—friends of his thought, brothers of his aim. He will ; but alas ! this will only bring a deeper tragedy. These young men, who have dared to share his dream of a free and united Italy, he must see mount the scaffold. He must see the hope of Italy perish. Nay, more, he must hear himself accused of hurrying those whom he most loved to their graves,—he, the gentlest, most loving of men, to whom the suffering of a bird could give pain, to whom the suffering of men brought anguish unspeakable !

There was a dreadful period in the beginning of MAZZINI'S struggle, when all the billows passed over him and his cause. The little band of brave hearts which he had drawn together was shattered, scattered,—some borne away to execution, some like himself to banishment. Then querulous suspicions fell on him ; friends fell away ; even some whom he had trusted yielded, turned against him, and against their cause. His own pen has described, as it alone could, the agony through which he passed. Let me read it to you.

“ Were I,” he says, “ to live for a century, I could never forget the close of that year, or the moral tempest that passed over me, amid the vortex of which

my soul was so nearly overwhelmed. . . . My soul was overflowing with and greedy of affection ; as fresh and eager to unfold to joy as in the days when sustained by my mother's smile ; as full of fervid hope, for others at least, if not for myself. But during those fatal months there darkened around me such a hurricane of sorrow, disillusion, and deception, as to bring before my eyes, in all its ghastly nakedness, a foreshadowing of the old age of my soul, solitary, in a desert world, wherein no comfort in the struggle was vouchsafed to me.

“It was not only the overthrow for an indefinite period of every Italian hope—the dispersion of the best of our party . . . it was the falling to pieces of that moral edifice of faith and love from which alone I had derived strength for the combat ; the scepticism I saw rising around me on every side ; the failure of faith in those who had solemnly bound themselves with me to pursue unshaken the path we had known at the outset to be choked with sorrows ; the distrust I detected in those most dear to me as to the motives and intentions which sustained and urged me onward in the evidently unequal struggle.

“When I felt that I was indeed alone in the world—alone but for my poor mother, far away and unhappy also for my sake—I drew back in terror from the void before me. Then, in that moral desert, doubt came upon me. Perhaps I was wrong and the world right ? Perhaps my idea was indeed a dream ? Perhaps I had been led, not by an idea, but by *my* idea—by the pride of my own conception ? The

forms of those shot at Alessandria and Chambery rose up before me like the phantoms of a crime and its unavailing remorse. I could not recall them to life. How many mothers had I caused to weep! How many more must learn to weep should I persist in the attempt to arouse the youth of Italy to noble action! . . . I was driven to the confines of madness. At times I started from my sleep at night, and ran to the window in delirium, believing that I heard the voice of Jacopo Ruffini calling to me. At times I felt irresistibly impelled to arise and go trembling into the room next my own, fancying that I should see there some friend whom I knew to be in prison, or hundreds of miles away. The slightest incident—a word, a tone—moved me to tears. Nature covered with snow, as it then was around Grenchen, appeared to me to wear a funereal shroud, beneath which it invited me to sink. . . . Whilst I was thus struggling and sinking beneath my cross, I heard a friend whose room was a few doors distant from mine answer a young girl who, having some suspicion of my unhappy condition, was urging him to break in upon my solitude, by saying, ‘Leave him alone; he is in his element, conspiring and happy.’ Ah, how little can men guess the state of mind of others, unless they regard it—and this is rarely done—by the light of a deep affection!”

So sank the great heart into its tremendous sea of cloud. As I have read these burning words I have remembered another who was overshadowed by a cloud; but from its blackness came what though others

might call thunder, to him was an angel's voice, "This is my beloved." I have remembered, too, the brave words of the leader of a small band, gathered under the shadow of a cross to serve a faith overhung with terror: "All our fathers passed under the cloud and through the sea, and were baptised in the cloud and in the sea." In the long procession of the faithful and true, here is another pilgrim, sad, wayworn, faint; he too passed under the cloud—disappeared. But there a voice whispered, "This is my beloved!" The storm of doubt passed, and there remained on him only its baptism. Only fine souls can feel such misgivings; to them such pangs mean new birth. So was it with MAZZINI. In that darkness there came to him fresh recognition of the sanctity of a man's true life-task; how duty to it is duty to the Universe; how it must be pursued unfalteringly, whoever, whatever may bend or break. The tranquil morning came when he could say, "Whether the sun shine with the serene splendour of an Italian morn, or the leaden corpse-like hue of the northern mist be above us, I cannot see that it changes our duty. God dwells above the earthly heaven, and the holy stars of faith and the future shine within our souls, even though their light consume itself unreflected as the sepulchral lamp."

Destiny made "United Italy" the expression of MAZZINI'S ideal, the visible shape of his aim. But they would little measure the largeness of the man who should imagine that his patriotism was narrowed to the separate interest of a single people. Indeed, the chief criticism which has been made during these past

weeks has been, that though Italy is united—though Rome is its capital—yet MAZZINI was not satisfied, would not lay aside his armour, was still carrying on his agitation as if nothing had been accomplished. Such criticisms are attestations that his aim meant something more than a territorial scheme. His hope for Italy was bound up with his hope for Humanity. More than thirty years ago Robert Browning imagined a poet who saw typified in the reintegration of Rome the triumph of mankind ; one who saw Rome emerging from her weeds,

an established point of light whence rays
Traversed the world.

By his side the hermit of that thought sat unrecognised—the poet of that vision, the living Sordello for whom there could be no resuscitated Rome, no risen Italy, until with them was a risen world. Suffer me to quote a letter written by MAZZINI to myself in 1865 concerning the duty of America, after she had conquered and expelled the internal foe, Slavery, which had so long fettered her energies.

He wrote :—“ There are for every great nation two stages of life. The first may be devoted to self-constitution, to inward organization, to the fitting up, so to say, of the implements and activities through which a nation can undertake the work appointed, and proceed to fulfil the task which has been ordained for her by God for the good of all mankind. For a nation is a living task ; her life is not her own, but a force and a function in the universal Providential

scheme. The second begins when, after having secured and asserted her own self, after having collected and shown to all the strength and the capability which breathe in her for the task, the nation enters the lists of Humanity, and links herself by noble deeds with the general aim. . . . You (of America) have become a leading nation. You may act as such. In the great battle which is fought throughout the world between right and wrong, justice and arbitrary rule, equality and privilege, duty and egotism, republic and monarchy, truth and lies, God and idols, your part is marked : you must accept it."

Hardly possible, one would say, that one who thus sees in nationalities a grand distribution of labours, each separate function a member and organ of Humanity,—hardly possible that one who for this had seen his comrades perish, and for it given himself as a living, a daily dying sacrifice, should now join in thoughtless enthusiasm because Italy is united under one sway of servility, and Rome has exchanged a weak Pope for a degraded Monarch. The frivolous may say this indicates perversity and egotism ! "He has no joy in his country's triumph because it has not come in the way he prescribed." But I trust there are some who will see, in this cessation of the struggle for a noble Italy only in death, the highest proof of the loftiness of this man's aim.

The temptations held out to induce him to take now the repose he had earned were strong. In London, where he had lived in an humbler way than his means warranted, in order that he might aid his needier

countrymen and his cause, he was surrounded by devoted friends, whose constant affection, whose cultured society might have given to his last years something of that beauty which had been denied him through life. One of these—a Member of Parliament—who had been as his brother through many years, wrote three days ago these private words, which I venture to quote :—“ His friends—I among others—pleaded with him to leave the fight, and live his few last years amongst us in peace and literary activity only. We said, ‘ You have put your country on the road to progress ; you have gained independence ; the rest is a work of time, of more time than is yours. Disappointment and apparent failure will attend the first steps.’ We failed because he was no egotist. While there was anything not achieved, and while he had power to move, he could not rest. Had he consented to end his political life before he yielded his mortal life, he would have received this side the grave the laurels that now will adorn the cemetery.”

It is a hard thought for those who knew him and loved him, but it is surely true. A nature only a little less devout—a spirit very slightly more self-regarding—would be here now, the centre and charm of a loving circle. To him such soft ties were harder to break through than chains of iron, but not the tenderest could hold back this devotee. To him the world was visionary, Duty was the solid and palpable thing. Where he trod others might see but void : he felt the granite under his feet.

So lived, so moved in the eyes of Europe, that

apparition of nobleness, JOSEPH MAZZINI ; thus and so Death found him, with eyes and hands still stretched forward—with feet still pursuing that aim which had called him in his boyhood, and which he knew to be the Divinely-assigned task of his life. He is gone, and the world is so much the poorer. But the young men of Italy will plant on his grave the cypress which he gave them for an emblem,—emblem of mourning, but of the faith that is evergreen ; they will write there his and their motto, “Ora e sempre,” “Now and for ever ;” they will remember there his words “Martyrdom is never barren, . . . because each man reads on the brow of the martyr a line of his own duty.”

THE END.