

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALITY: A
DISCOURSE, PREACHED IN THE
UNITARIAN
CHURCH, MONTREAL, ON THE SUNDAY
AFTER THE GREAT RAILWAY
CELEBRATION, NOVEMBER, 1856**

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The Foundations of Nationality: A Discourse, Preached in the Unitarian Church, Montreal, on the Sunday After the Great Railway Celebration, November, 1856 by John Cordner

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THE

FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALITY.

“ I WILL MAKE A MAN MORE PRECIOUS THAN FINE GOLD ;
EVEN A MAN THAN THE GOLDEN WEDGE OF OPHIR.”

ISAIAH xlii. 12.

THESE significant words lie embedded in an ancient prophecy concerning Babylon. In looking back through the dim vista of the old and far distant civilizations that of Babylon looms up with profuse grandeur and magnificence. Babylonia, or Chaldea, was the most ancient kingdom in the world of which we have any historic knowledge. The Chinese claim an earlier national existence, and may have had it, but we do not find it in independent history. The Chaldean or Babylonian kingdom was probably founded by Nimrod, of the fourth generation from Noah. It had its place in Asia with the Tigris for a boundary, and the Euphrates rolling through its centre. As these are two of the rivers which watered Eden we may infer that the site of this ancient kingdom was not far distant from the spot whence the race from Adam was originally distributed. As well as chronologists can ascertain, the foundation of Babylon, the chief city of the kingdom, was laid by Nimrod more than twenty-two centuries before Christ. We read in Genesis of Nimrod, the son of

Cush, a mighty hunter before the Lord, and the beginning of whose kingdom was Babel. This mighty hunter laid the foundation of his city somewhat earlier than his kinsman Ashur laid the foundation of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and more than fifty years before his uncle Mizraim built Memphis, the most ancient capital of ancient Egypt. The thought of Babylon, then, carries us far back into the remote past, and this to the contemplative spirit has not only high charms for the imagination, but copious material for reflection. In the vast sweep of time, and in the stupendous revolutions which it accomplishes in human affairs, the philosophic mind finds matter and scope for some of its grandest speculations, and the mind that rises higher than the merely philosophic plane—which possesses the spirit of religion as a living thing,— beholds with wonder and reverential trust the working of God's great plan of Providence.

Babylon was planned and constructed on a scale of immense magnitude, and, standing among the nations of remote antiquity, it seems to have had a splendor peculiarly its own. The culminating era of its grandeur seems to have been under Nebuchadnezzar, who flourished about six centuries before Christ, and by whom the captivity of the Hebrews was completed, and the city of Jerusalem destroyed. If we may credit Herodotus, who saw Babylon within a century and a half subsequent to the time of Nebuchadnezzar, its dimensions were fifteen miles square, enclosed by a brick wall more than eighty feet thick, and three hundred and fifty feet high. The circuit of this great city wall, then, was sixty miles. We are not told that the entire enclosed space was built up, but we are told of its containing structures

of surpassing magnitude and magnificence. The temple of Belus in Babylon was more extensive in its proportions than the temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem, and Jehovah's temple was plundered to add to the wealth of its appointments. The royal palace with its hanging gardens — immense terraces of blooming and luxuriant earth, rising one above the other to the height of the great wall itself, and resting upon structures of arched mason work, seems to belong to the region of imagination, rather than to that of actual and accomplished fact. Proud of such tokens of her power and prosperity Babylon sat among the nations as queen. The prophet speaks of her as "the golden city" (Is. xiv. 4.) — as "the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency." (Is. xiii. 19.) He speaks of her thus as "the glory of kingdoms, and the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency," and yet, in the same breath, he declares that she "shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."

Here is a portion of the burden of Isaiah concerning Babylon: "Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty..... I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity;.....I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger..... And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation:

neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and the owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces, and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." (Is. xiii.). What a picture of desolation is drawn here! And I need not now remind you how it has been accomplished. Even the beasts, and the owls, have long since ceased to shelter in its houses and palaces. The sands of the desert have engulfed the ruins of all, and blotted it from the face of the earth.

In these tame later days of ours, and with our tamer habits of thought, we can scarcely understand the fire of the ancient prophet in his denunciation of human wickedness — we can scarcely appreciate his terrible earnestness and energy in asserting the everlasting laws of God. "Howl ye," he cries, "for the day of the Lord is at hand. I will punish the world for their evil. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger." Here is a strong — a vehement assertion of a divine everlasting Law. Nothing transcends a Man in value. No gold, not even the finest, no wealth, no widespread national domains, no stupendous national monuments — none of these can rank as a man's equal in value. God holds a man in higher estimation than gold, or any magnificence which gold can buy, or the

shining wealth of Ophir build up, and he will vindicate this law in his dealings with the nations. Yea, he will overthrow them one by one, as a man turneth over an ant-hill, until they come to learn, and respect, and live for this law. Babylon shall fall, and Assyria shall fall, and Egypt shall fall, and Greece shall fall, and Rome shall fall — yea, the heavens shall be shaken, and the earth thrown from her sphere, if the inhabitants thereof fail to recognize, and accept, and act upon this declared principle of God's providential government.

I have adverted to some of the details of the visible greatness of Babylon. And for what purpose? Was it merely to excite a moment's wonder by contemplating a palace so vast and grand, a wall so thick and lofty, a temple so capacious and magnificent? No. Such a purpose were not worthy this place, and this hour. I did so to the end that ye might take note of the direction in which the Babylonian civilization put forth its greatest efforts. It sought wide national domains that it might reap a golden harvest of tribute. It sought to gather to itself the rich and shining wedges of Ophir. And with these treasures it constructed and adorned its palaces, its halls, and its temples, until they became marvels of magnitude and magnificence. Of a similar type was the Assyrian civilization, as history informs us, and the exhumed remains thereof show us at the present day. The Egyptian civilization, though possessed of some elements of a higher order, yet had many prominent and important points in common with it, as the huge remains of Thebes and Memphis still indicate. And now what is the tale which such huge remains whisper into the ear of the thoughtful spirit! As we