

Making Molehills Out of Mountains

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue, cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!*

Psalms 137:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people," and God, himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21: 1-5

Husbands like to tell their wives that they are "making mountains out of molehills." And sometimes they are not – and sometimes they are. For it is easy to take an annoying trifle and blow it out of all reasonable proportion. The more emotionally unstable we are, the more insecure and anxiety ridden we are, the more likely we are to take trivia, small slights, innuendoes, inconsequentials, and magnify them until they loom so large on our emotional horizon, we can't sleep, eat, or think about anything else. It gets to be a kind of sickness, this making "sinisters" out of little sillies. And it infects the whole family. So stop it.....

There is, however, another side of the matter, the opposite extreme, equally widespread, and possibly even more insidious. It can be a very bad sickness, even a social sickness. It is called "making molehills out of mountains." Here, we do not take a trifle and blow it up out of all proportion to its true importance. Here, we take something that is truly important – and we SHRINK it to a trifle. Like those cannibal tribes who take human heads and shrink them down to the size of tennis balls, we take the sacred in human life and in our semantic pots boil it down to silliness. We deflate major moral lapses to peccadilloes. We also have a maniacal ability to

reduce the noble to the absurd, to make the permanent disposable. So we create a temporary society, throwaway people, and non-values on which there is no deposit and no return.

In short, we are quite capable of taking every mountain, every lofty human aspiration – every noble dream of truth, beauty, love – and reducing it all to the level of a TV cracker commercial – an endless vista of molehills, in livid color!

A seventeen-year-old told me what he inherited from his parent. “Unbelief is what I inherited from them,” he said. “They didn’t believe in anything, they didn’t believe in God, people or especially me, and I’m a limb off that dead tree, man! I’m strictly unbelievable.” That boy had reduced himself to an absurdity. He views himself as disposable, as disposable as a beer can. He has a high IQ – but a molehill perspective.

But this is not just a sickness of young drifters. I think of a much older and more “successful” man. With one exception, he has spent his life making molehills out of mountains. He says he has never been inspired, uplifted, ennobled by any of the arts. Music, painting, poetry -- none of this has ever touched him. He admits he is unmoved by nature. He does not marvel at the history of the race -- love of country leaves him cold. So does the plight of man. He cannot understand any fight for justice, any feeling of mercy. Home and family are his burden. God is nothing to him, and the Church is next to nothing. It is a nuisance. He has never felt a sense of awe or reverence. The holy escapes him entirely. He has no heroes; no one demands his unbounded admiration. He has spent his days debunking and depreciating and pooh-poohing everything and everybody. In short, his life is one long vista of molehills. Nowadays he drinks too much, is beginning to talk aloud to himself, and except for the comfort of his nest egg, he might wish he were dead.

Indeed, when a person, young or old, or a people, ancient or modern, loses the ideal and the dream – they are getting close, perilously close, to true death.

Not so, the old Jew. Jerusalem was built on seven hills. And one of them was Mt. Zion. David captured it in 1000 BC (take or leave a year), made his capitol there, and Mt. Zion came to be identified with the City, with Israel, with the religion and life that was centered there. And the Jews never made a molehill out of this mountain, never scoffed at it, demeaned it – never shrank it to an absurdity. It remains to this very day symbolic of the aspirations of Israel, filled

with memory and hope. In every period of their captivity, the vision of Mt. Zion has strengthened and steadied the Jews.

And Christians took up this symbol of "The Holy City, the New Jerusalem," a realm where there would be "no more death, no more grief, crying, or pain," and it became a lofty ideal for them, a memory and a challenge, and they dreamed of

"Marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion
We're marching upward to Zion ...
The beautiful City of God."

And what has happened to the beautiful dream today? Has Mt. Zion been reduced to a molehill? Has all it stood for, every high and holy hope of mankind been shrunken to cheapness, trashiness, meanness? Maybe in you or in me. But not in everyone. Not by a long shot.

Never in the history of man, have so many been so alive to the ideal and the dream, and given themselves so eagerly to it. The old Jewish-Christian ideal is far from realized, must less attained, but more human beings now give themselves more radically to the eradication of "death, grief, crying, or pain," than ever before. There are more governments, more institutions, more groups and more individuals more dedicated to the idea of "Liberty and Justice for all" than ever before – mountains of them, and it is doubtful that even the gates of violence, ignorance, cupidity and other hells will prevail against them.

You can sit in your den and disparage every noble effort to benefit humanity if you want to. You can deride every dream of ending poverty, war, and racial hatred if you please. But these are mountainous efforts, and will never; no never be molehills again. For man is on the move, I tell you, marching to Zion. He may go at it circuitously, curiously, he may do it erratically, foolishly, dangerously. He may die on the way. But the old aspirations are not dead. They are just seeing a new day. You better believe it.

Let us pray:

O Lord, some of us need a new vision, to see a new heaven and a new earth, to see the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, to hear a loud voice speaking from the throne, "No God's home is with men! He will live with them and they shall be his people. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no death, no more grief, crying or pain."
Amen