

essional testimony and enthusiasm' (so prescribes the liturgy) 'the clergy with one accord raise their hands aloft. . . . *They so imitate the cross and are mystically extended thereon, and nailed upon wings of holy mystery.*'¹ So it is a mystic rite denoting the unification with Christ, with whom the Chris-

¹ Conybeare, *loc. cit.* p. 140.

tian shares the cross and its death, emerging from baptism renewed and regenerated to a new, holy, and blessed life. In this interpretation of the rite I have said more than can as yet be inferred from our text. So I proceed to show that this view is the right one.

(To be concluded.)

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH XXVIII. 16.

'Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.'—R.V.

1. THE twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Isaiah is one of the greatest of his prophecies. It is distinguished by that regal versatility of style which places its author at the head of Hebrew writers. Keen analyses of character, realistic contrasts between sin and judgment, clever retorts and epigrams, rapids of scorn, and 'a spate' of judgment, but for final issue a placid stream of argument banked by sweet parable—such are the literary charms of the chapter, which derives its moral grandeur from the force with which its currents set towards faith and reason, as together the salvation of states, politicians and private men. The style mirrors life about ourselves, and still tastes fresh to thirsty men. The truths are relevant to every day in which luxury and intemperance abound, in which there are eyes too fevered by sin to see beauty in simple purity, and minds so surfeited with knowledge or intoxicated with their own cleverness that they call the maxims of moral reason commonplace, and scorn religious instruction as food for babes.

Some time when the big, black cloud was gathering again on the north, Isaiah raised his voice to the magnates of Jerusalem: 'Lift your heads from your wine-bowls; look north. The sunshine is still on Samaria, and your fellow-drinkers there are revelling in security. But the storm creeps up behind. They shall certainly perish soon; even you cannot help seeing that. Let it scare you, for their sin is yours, and that storm will not exhaust itself on Samaria. Do not think that your clever

policies, alliance with Egypt or the treaty with Assyria herself, shall save you. Men are never saved from death and hell by making covenants with them. Scorners of religion and righteousness, except ye cease being sceptical and drunken, and come back from your diplomacy to faith and reason, ye shall not be saved! This destruction that looms is going to cover the whole earth. So stop your running to and fro across it in search of alliances. *He that believeth shall not make haste.* Stay at home and trust in the God of Zion, for Zion is the one thing that shall survive.'

2. Isaiah's words have a wide application. Short of faith as he exemplified it, there is no possibility for the spirit of man to be free from uneasiness. It is so all along the scale of human endeavour. No power of patience or of hope is his who cannot imagine possibilities of truth outside his own opinions, or trust a justice larger than his private rights. It is here very often that the real test of our faith meets us. If we seek to fit life solely to the conception of our privileges, if in the preaching of our opinions no mystery of higher truth awe us at least into reverence and caution; then, whatever religious creeds we profess, we are not men of faith, but shall surely inherit the bitterness and turmoil that are the portion of unbelievers. If we make it the chief aim of our politics to drive cheap bargains for our trade or to be consistent to party or class interests; if we trim our conscience to popular opinion; if we sell our honesty in business or our love in marriage, that we may be comfortable in the world; then, however firmly we may be established in reputation or in welfare, we have given our spiritual nature a support utterly inadequate to its needs, and we shall never find rest. Sooner or later, a man must

feel the pinch of having cut his life short of the demands of conscience. Only a generous loyalty to her decrees will leave him freedom of heart and room for his arm to swing. Nor will any philosophy, however comprehensive, nor poetic fancy, however elastic, be able without the complement of faith to arrange, to account for, or to console us for, the actual facts of experience. It is only belief in the God of Isaiah, a true and loving God, omnipotent Ruler of our life, that can bring us peace. There was never a sorrow, that did not find explanation in that; never a tired thought, that would not cling to it. There are no interests so scattered or energies so far-reaching that there is not return and rest for them under the shadow of His wings. *He that believeth shall not make haste.* *Be still,* says a psalm of the same date as Isaiah—*Be still, and know that I am God.*¹

I.

He that believeth.

'*He that believeth shall not make haste.*' Freedom from feverishness is a mark of faith.

1. When we turn to the dealings of God with men, there is one thing that impresses us very deeply. It is the slowness of all God's procedure in guiding and blessing our humanity. God never hurries; He moves with infinite ease. He takes an age to perfect one of His thoughts within us. What we might call the leisureliness of providence is written large on human history. Think of the weary discipline of Israel till they had grasped the mighty truth that God is one; remember how men had to wait for centuries before the world was ready for Christ Jesus; reflect that nineteen centuries have gone, and we seem only to be touching the hem of Christ's garment yet—and you will apprehend the leisureliness of heaven. In all God's dealings with the human race, and in all God's dealings with the human soul, there is purpose, urgency, infinite persistence; but no man will detect hurry there. Let the text illuminate that thought. It is because God believes in man that He refuses to hurry his development. If there were no potentiality in human nature, no promise of a divine ideal at its core, a single season might be enough to ripen it—as it ripens the corn that rustles in the field. There are creatures that dance and die all in one summer's evening; and a

summer's evening is long enough for them. But a thousand evenings are not enough for man, there is such promise in the sorriest life. When we think how long a little child is helpless, absolutely dependent on another's love; when we think of the slow stages of our growth up the steep slope to moral and spiritual manhood; when we remember that every vision that beckons us, and every hope that fires us, and every truth that illuminates and saves us, was won out of the riches of God, through the discipline and the chastisement of ages, we feel that the belief of God in man is wonderful: He hath believed in us, and therefore hath made no haste. We speak a great deal about our faith in God. Never forget God's glorious faith in us.

And when we pass to the earthly life of Jesus, we are arrested by the same procedure there. He was leisurely, just because He trusted men. He did not despair of them when they were backward; He did not reject them because they were slow to learn. When He had chosen a heart, He trained it with infinite patience, and just because He believed in it, He would not hurry. Compare His treatment of Judas with that of Peter. Christ did not believe in the sincerity of Judas. He knew him to be a hypocrite, and a traitor, and 'what thou doest do quickly'—haste! get done with it! But Peter! Christ thoroughly believed in Peter. He saw the possibilities in Peter. He knew that underneath the sand, driven by the wind, there was bed-rock to build a church upon. So Peter was allowed to go out into the night, and to weep bitter tears under the look of Christ. There was no hurry. Let him weep his eyes out. Jesus believed in Peter, and let him alone. And Jesus was scourged and hung upon the cross, and lay in the grave, and rose on the third day, and the hours seemed endless to the fallen disciple, yet never a word of comfort came from his Lord. Then at long last, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' 'Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.' The wheels of the chariot of Christ had tarried, just because He trusted that great heart.

The man who believes in himself and in his message is never in a hurry to see results. The army general who cannot trust himself grows feverish for some brilliant deed of arms. But Lord Kitchener will wait and plan and scheme till the whole nation grows restless and impatient; he believes in himself, and he will not make haste. It is always a mark of inferior capacity to be in a feverish hurry to be recognised. No genius ever goes to sleep with the wild hope that to-morrow he may wake up famous. Genius is sublimely

¹ G. A. Smith.

confident and easy; with the touch of God-given power comes sweet assurance.¹

2. Jesus Christ is the 'sure foundation' of our faith. 'He that believeth' in Christ—he, that is to say, who accepts Christ's interpretation of life—'shall not make haste.'

(1) Christ is the foundation of all *restful knowledge*. He is the foundation of all our knowledge of God, and of all our true knowledge of ourselves, of all our true knowledge of duty, and all our true knowledge of the relations between the present and the future, between man and God. And in His life, the history of His death and resurrection, is the only foundation of any real knowledge of the awful mysteries that lie beyond the grave. He is the Alpha from whom all truth must be deduced, the Omega to which it all leads up. Certitude is in Him. Apart from Him we are but groping amid peradventures. If we *know* anything about God, it is due to Jesus Christ. If we *know* anything about ourselves, it is due to Him. If we *know* anything about what men ought to do, it is because He has done all human duty. And if, into the mist and darkness that wraps the future, there has ever travelled one clear beam of insight, it is because He has died and risen again.

(2) He is the foundation of all *restful love*, and the fixed pattern for all noble and pure living. Otherwise man's notions of what is virtuous and good are much at the mercy of conventional variations of opinion. This class, that community, this generation, that school, all differ in their notions of what is true nobleness and goodness of life. And we are left at the mercy of fluctuating standards unless we take Christ in His recorded life as the one realised ideal of manhood, the pattern of what we ought to be.

(3) The foundation is a *tried* stone. The language of the text, 'a stone of proof,' as it reads in the original, probably means a stone which has been tested and has stood the trial. And because it is thus a tested stone, it therefore is a precious stone. There are two kinds of testing—the testing from the assaults of enemies, and the testing by the building upon it of friends. And both these methods of proof have been applied, and it has stood the test.

Think of all the assaults that have been made from this side and the other against Christ and His gospel. What has become of them all?

¹ G. H. Morrison, *Sun-Rise*, 201.

Travellers tell us how they often see some wandering tribes of savage Arabs trying to move the great stones, for instance, of Baalbec—those wonders of unfinished architecture. But what can a crowd of such people, with all their crowbars and levers, do to the great stone bedded there, where it has been for centuries? They cannot stir it one hair's-breadth. And so, against Jesus Christ and His gospel there has stormed for eighteen hundred years an assaulting crowd, varying in its individuals and its methods of attack, but the same in its purpose, and the same in the fruitlessness of its effort. Century after century they have said, as they are saying to-day, 'Now the final assault is going to be delivered; it can never stand *this*.' And when the smoke has cleared away there may be a little blackening upon the edge, but there is not a chip off its bulk, and it stands in its bed where it did; and of all the grand preparations for a shattering explosion, nothing is left but a sulphurous smell, and a wreath of smoke, and both are floating away down into the distance.

But there is the other kind of testing. One proves the foundation by building upon it. If the stone be soft, if it be slender, if it be imperfectly bedded, it will crumble, it will shift, it will sink. But this stone has borne all the weight that the world has laid upon it, and borne it up.

A Czar of Russia, in the old days, was mad enough to build a great palace upon the ice-blocks of the Neva. And when the spring came, and the foundations melted, the house, full of delights and luxury, sank beneath the river. We build upon frozen water, and when the thaw comes, what we build sinks and is lost to sight. Instead of love that twines round the creature, and trails, bleeding and bruised, along the ground when the prop is taken away, let us turn our hearts to the warm, close, pure, perfect changeless love of the undying Christ, and we shall build above the fear of change. The dove's nest in the pine-tree falls in ruin when the axe is laid to the root. Let us build our nests in the clefts of the rock, and no hand will ever reach them.¹

II.

Shall not make haste.

The word *make haste* is onomatopoeic, like our word *fuss*, and this is its exact equivalent in meaning.

1. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' That does not mean that he that believeth shall never be hurried. This matter of haste is not a purely personal matter. We live in a hasting

¹ A. Maclaren.

world—a world full of conditions that we did not make and must accept. We cannot live as if this world were a quiet world. We cannot ignore the rush of life. A man in his office may be a saint, but the most beatific vision he shall ever enjoy will not silence the ting-ting of his telephone bell, or stop the rush of telegrams, or lessen that pile of letters that he finds on his desk every morning of the week.

And it is necessary to distinguish the haste of the text from strenuous speed. Every one who is at all in earnest about things feels the push and the pull to get his life-work done; but a strenuous and resolute forwardness such as that is very different from the spirit of haste. 'Unhasting but unresting' should be the motto on every Christian's coat of arms. It is impossible that a true Christian should be a sluggard. Such new conceptions of life have dawned on him; duty, and service, and the building up of character, are so expanded when God has touched the soul, that as with the stirring music of the trumpet we are called to redeem the time because the days are evil. But the man who hastes never redeems the time. You never redeem anything by hurrying up. And it is of that impatience, so closely akin to fickleness—and an age of hurry is extraordinarily fickle—it is of that impatience which knows no inward quietude, and which robs life of its music and its march, that the prophet is speaking here. He that believeth shall run and not be weary. He that believeth shall press toward the mark. He that believeth—God to his tardy feet has promised to lend the swiftness of the roe. But spite of that—nay, because of that—he that believeth shall not make haste.

2. Isaiah linked this great word about living life quietly with a prophecy concerning the Christ who was to come. Christ has come, and the manner of His life among men, and the spirit of it, we know. He said He came that men might have life. It was life they were missing then. And, strange enough it seems to say it in these pulsating and strenuous days, it is life they are missing now. Jesus understood life completely. He was more human than we are, because He was Divine, and His divinity took hold of all that is essential in humanity. And that was the secret of the quietness of the life of Jesus. It was a life lived for the essential things; it was a life lived not for the present but for the for-ever.

(1) It is *missing the essential things* that turns

life into a rush and a whirl and a selfish struggle. The world is in a mighty hurry, not because its life is so full—though that is the way it always accounts for its haste—but because it is so empty; not because it touches reality at so many points, but because it misses it at all points. The more we hurry the less we live. Life is not to be gauged merely quantitatively. There is a qualitative measurement. The length of life is found by measuring its depth. It goes inward to the core of the soul. It takes its meaning there and carries that meaning out into the eternity of God. The things that really make life are the things out of which haste for ever cheats a man. 'He that believeth shall not make haste,' because his faith shall show him the futility and the needlessness of haste. It shall gird him with the patience and the peace of them that seek the essential things—wealth of soul, strength of character, purity of heart, communion with God—things that impatience cannot seize in a moment and that faith cannot miss if it seeks them. Haste is the product of a low and mistaken view of life. It is the outcome of a vast delusion concerning the things that matter and the things that last. Faith discovers the delusions, and lays hold upon the few great simple things that really count in life's long reckonings—the clean heart, the good conscience, justice, mercy, sympathy, and the service of love.

(2) And, further, the haste of the world is the result of the *short view of life*. The world is in such a desperate hurry because it has no plan, no toil, no aspiration, which the nightfall will not blot out. Look at the pathetic parable of haste written right across the world—the hurried step, the strained face, the life-driven expression with which we are all too familiar. It means that the world is busy with work it will soon have to put down. If a man means to make money, he knows that he has but a few mortal years to make it. The desire of the world is of the days and the years. 'Now or never' is stamped upon its activities and its enterprises. This does not mean that the haste of the world comes because men have an overwhelming sense, or even any sense at all, of the brevity of life. The modern world does not think of such things. But neither does it think of and realize the eternity of life; and it is failing to do this that makes men the prey of haste. Faith in Jesus Christ teaches us that every man must have time to live. He that believeth shall not make haste.

He has eternity for a practical factor. He learns by his faith to live in the eternal now. His faith reveals to him the simple moral content of the present. There is a sense in which faith alone can live for the present, because faith alone has the future. Unbelief has no to-morrow. Worldliness has no time to live.

We often say, 'I wish I had more time,' meaning, of course, that we wish we could dispose of the hours of the day more in accordance with our personal desires. But our real need in life is not more time but more eternity. Instead of saying, 'Now or never,' Christ teaches to say, 'Now and for ever.' He that believeth shall find the eternal meaning and the eternal issues of these fleeting hours. He shall know that he has time in which to do his best because the highest faith of his soul, the deepest desire of his heart, the most real significance of his daily toil, goes on for ever into the eternity of God. He that believeth can live for to-day a life unhampered by the claims of to-morrow because he is living for the for-ever. He shall not be afraid of missing anything really worth having. He shall not clutch with too eager hands at life as it seems to be rushing past him, for his faith shall teach him—the Christ shall teach him—that life is not something that rushes past us and must be grasped at or missed, but something that dwelleth in us, and the true name of it is the peace of God through Jesus Christ the Saviour and the Lover of souls.¹

III.

He that believeth shall not make haste.

It comes to this when all is said: it is our unbelief, our irreligion, our foolish eagerness for the things that do not matter and do not endure, our foolish blindness to the quiet, everlasting things, whereof each one of us may fashion his life if he will, that make us the easy prey of an anxious, restless, and precipitant world. Would we be delivered from the haste that is about us? Then let us seek first of all and always to be delivered from the haste that is within us.

1. Thus living for essentials, we shall not be in a great hurry to enjoy the pleasures of life. Perhaps the haste to be rich and taste life's pleasures was never so markedly felt as it is now. It is always a difficult thing to wait. David was never more saintly in his life than just when he waited patiently for God. But to-day, when the means of enjoyment are so multiplied and the music of the world is doubly sweet, the monotony of duty has become doubly irksome. We nourish a certain rebellion at our lot, a craving for immediate satisfaction; a bitter willingness to forget the morrow if only we can snatch some pleasure now;

¹ P. C. Ainsworth.

and to all men and women who are tempted so—and multitudes are tempted so to-day—comes the stern word of the eternal God, 'He that believeth shall not make haste.' The modern catechism asks, 'What is man's chief end?' and the answer it gives is, 'Man's chief end is to enjoy life.' But the older catechism was wiser when it answered, 'Man's chief end is to enjoy God,' and God can be enjoyed only in the sphere of duty and along the line of work. Outside of that, the presence of God is lost, and the cup is always bitter when that is lost. However grey and cheerless duty may be, a man must trample down his moods and do it. Then, in God's time, far sooner than we dream, the richest joys will reach us unexpectedly, and life will unfold itself, out of the mists, into a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

2. We shall not be in a hurry to see results. The Christian life is an ascent. It does not lend itself to wild rushes and brilliant spurts. It is an upward climb, difficult and arduous. The task that confronts the Christian can be mastered by patience, and by patience only. The Christian suspects the path that is too smooth, and the cause that goes too swimmingly. He begins to ask himself whether the speed at which he is travelling does not prove that the road is descending rather than rising; or else that he is speeding along some dead level, and wasting his years on the same altitude. He knows that really to lift life demands the fullest force of soul; that the road he ought to travel 'winds uphill all the way.' The man of faith stands committed to a life which is an ascent, and suspects any other. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

'The Church was, in fact, anxious to establish prematurely a world-wide Theocracy, and fancied that she saw the means of doing this through an alliance with a world which now professed friendship instead of hostility. She was mistaken in thinking that any form of Theocracy, such as this alliance would establish, could be the Kingdom which Christ had intended to set up. . . . Had she remembered and realized the full import of His saying, "My kingdom is not of this world"; had she been mindful of the stern test which He always laid down for discipleship; had she regarded the method which He Himself consistently pursued, the course of her history would have been very different, and the foundations of Christianity would have been more securely, though far more slowly, laid. "He that believeth shall not make haste"—the haste of the Church was a measure of the imperfection of her faith.'¹

¹ Hobhouse, *The Church and the World in Idea and in History*, 163-4.

It was a great idea of Nathaniel Hawthorne's to represent the modern pilgrim's progress to the celestial city as taken in a railway train and in a saloon carriage, luxuriously upholstered, so that the irritating discomforts and delays that beset the pilgrimage of Christians might be henceforth rendered impossible. But Hawthorne, before he has finished, lets us see what a fantasy it all is, and how stern an actual reality the pilgrimage remains. It is still a pilgrimage to be plodded on foot, 'o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent.' Life is still, with all our science and philosophy, a business that demands hard thinking and deep feeling. Every true man who gets anywhere worth getting to, pioneers a path through scrub and brushwood, across steep and difficult ground often; clearing a way sometimes inch by inch with stubborn, patient effort.

'The angels upon Jacob's ladder,' says St. Francis of Sales, 'have wings, yet they fly not, but ascend and descend in order from step to step. The soul that rises from sin to devotion is compared to the dawning of the morning, which drives away the darkness not in an instant, but by degrees. The slow cure, says the proverb, is the safe cure. The diseases of the soul, as of the body, come post-haste on horseback, but they go away on foot at a snail's pace. O Philothea, in what danger are they of relapsing who are taken too soon out of the physician's hands!'

Thomas Henry Green said, speaking of life's lessons, 'A great part of the discipline of life arises simply from its slowness. The long years of patient waiting and silent labour . . . these are the tests of that pertinacity of man, which is but a step below heroism.' The last lesson many of us learn is to 'labour and to wait.' An old man, summing up his experiences, said he had known far more instances of men coming too soon to wealth and position than of their coming too late. The little child who hurries out into the garden and pulls up the newly planted bulb to see whether it is growing is no more foolish than the Christian worker who is impatient as to 'results.' It is hard to 'rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.'

3. In all *Christian work*, as in Christian character, we shall not be in a hurry to see results. The all-commanding power and beauty of that dear majestic Figure of Christ lie in His Divine calm. Amid the frenzy and fury of the world, the wild schemes, and universal unrest, He stands alone in His transcendent quiet. Where other world reformers fly from place to place, from land to land, in a very passion of vehemence, He passes

quietly through the villages and towns of one of the smallest of countries; and with only three years in which to do the work the centuries shall not be able to undo, there is no trace of hurry or excitement or agitation. He teaches line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, sowing gently in good soil the seed that can never die. There stands the life of faith, the calm, tranquil serenity of a confidence that consists with no illusions but only with clearest and amplest vision of God and man. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

It is easy for those who do not know sin, who have not felt its awful, deadening, paralysing power in themselves, to wonder at the slow progress of good. But 'he that believeth' will give way neither to easy optimism nor to despair of good. Not less earnestly, but more patiently, not less hopefully, but more trustfully, will he struggle against the sin which is within him and around him. He knows how real it is, how slow it is to yield to the love of God; but he knows, too, that God has laid a sure foundation in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and though the building of the spiritual temple of restored humanity is slow, he does not 'make haste.' It is enough for him to be a fellow-worker with God in the regeneration of man, and to know that God will in His own time hasten His work.¹

I haste no more.

At dawn or when the day is done,

The sun comes calmly to his place:
I've learned the lesson of the sun.

I haste no more.

For Spring and Autumn earth decrees

The leaves shall bud, the leaves shall fall.
I've learned the lesson of the trees.

I haste no more.

At flood or ebb as it may be,

The ocean answers to the moon:
I've learned the lesson of the sea.

I haste no more.

Whate'er, whoe'er is mine—these must

On God's ways meet me in God's time:
I've learned the lesson, and I trust.²

¹ A. L. Moore.

² M. J. Savage, *America to England*.