

John the Baptist came as the herald and forerunner of the last and greatest of the prophets, the God-man Jesus Christ, who ushered in the final, the absolute, universal religion. God's pædagogic method along that line of development was thus vindicated.

We might pursue a similar course of inquiry along the lines of development amongst other peoples. We might examine the search after God amongst the great Aryan races, the Hindus and the Greeks.¹ We might study the religious factors in Zoroastrianism, with its unsatisfying dualism, or the intensely interesting struggle of Buddhism to conquer and eliminate desire. But we must forbear. The lesson enforced by the study of all these religions is that

¹ See chap. viii., entitled 'The Greek Solution,' in Principal Iverach's *Is God Knowable?* (London, 1877), a chapter which has been freely utilized (sometimes without acknowledgment) by subsequent writers.

more or less of Divine guidance has been vouchsafed to seekers after God and the truth in each one of them, that God has taught men, were it only by the failure of their efforts, to welcome the truth that is bound up in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The struggle has been a protracted one, and in many quarters it is not yet over; there have been frequent periods of religious stagnation or even of retrogression. Yet we are firmly persuaded that there has been a Divinely guided order of thoughts as well as events all through the ages, and that the knowledge of the true God is yet destined to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

For, while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.²

² Clough.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH XXX. 15.

'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'

1. JUDAH was a little country, situated between two great military empires, Assyria and Egypt, just as Switzerland is situated between France and Germany. At the time to which the text refers there was great fear that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, would invade the land. The politicians of Judah were therefore very active in trying to arrange an offensive and defensive alliance with Egypt. At this critical juncture Isaiah issued a political manifesto in favour of rational non-intervention. In the chapter before us, in ever-memorable and ever-useful language, he warns his fellow-countrymen against dangerous entanglements with Egypt, and all other doubtful diplomatic proceedings. He entreats them to remember that the two conditions of national security are quietness and confidence; that is to say, minding their own business and putting their trust in God, carefully avoiding any interference with the affairs of other people, and relying, not upon military preparations, but upon doing their duty to God and man.

2. There is a character that is fussy, and flurried, and restless—totally without repose, totally without dignity, always in extremes. There is no perspective about it, no silence, no sobriety, no self-control; it values no blessing which it has, because it is always yearning for some blessing which it has not; it enjoys no source of happiness in the present, because it is always fretting for some source of happiness in the future. It is bred by a harassed age in which we find no leisure; in which

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon;
or, in which, as another expresses it, we

See all sights from pole to pole,
And glance, and nod, and bustle by;
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

The text, beautiful in itself, has had for many a singular charm. It is the motto of that quiet and holy book which has soothed so many restless souls—the *Christian Year*.

I.

Quietness.

The lesson of quietness is set for us again and again in the Scriptures. We are told that the effect of righteousness is quietness. We are specially exhorted to 'study to be quiet'; to make a study of it as something to be learned, as one would learn an art or train one's self in beauty of living. In the margin the language is even stronger—'Be ambitious to be quiet.' Another saying of the New Testament is, referring to women, 'The apparel of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in the sight of God.' Quietness is extolled, too, as a privilege in a noisy world. 'A dry morsel and quietness therewith is better than a feast with strife and contention.'

1. What is Quietness? Quietness is stillness, silence, meekness of soul. It is submission, surrender, sacrifice, self-renunciation. It assumes the giving up of the saved life into the Redeemer's keeping, and receiving it back again from Him with sweet contentment. It accepts with holy tenderness all His dealings and designs in carrying forward the education of the soul. It brings with it the entire absence of self-will, alongside of a beautiful and blessed manifestation of strength of will, and force of character, asserted all for Him.

Quietness is the reverse of excitement. There is no doubt that excitement has its place in the economy of God. That arousing, that stirring up, that quickening from lethargy, which makes activity a necessity, and existence a delight, has its place even in religion. Without excitement there can be no revival, no rising of a dead Church into a living and moving one. Wherever there has been torpor, wherever there has been sleep, wherever there has been indifference, there must be excitement before there can be energy. The day of Pentecost was a scene of great excitement: mocking bystanders even said, 'These men are full of new wine.' And St. Paul seems to recognize the parallel between the excitement of intemperance and the quickened pulsation of grace, when he says in his exhortation to the Ephesians, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.' Or St. James, 'Is any merry? let him sing psalms.'

Yet excitement is not strength. It may counter-

feit it. It may even, for a moment or two, in a spasmodic, feverish, haphazard way, give an impulse not natural; nerve a weak arm for a feat of courage, or a feeble spirit for a prodigy of resistance. But when by strength we mean something inherent, something habitual, something permanent, we must look elsewhere for it than to excitement, whether we are speaking of the religious life, or of the life of time. Quietness is strength. It is the quiet nature that works. It is the quiet spirit that influences. It is the quiet life that impresses and that assimilates. Excitement 'rages and is confident.' Excitement talks and bustles and pushes. Excitement is the passion of an hour, the stimulus of a day. But excitement, if in any sense it stirs the world, cannot move and cannot guide it. There is only one kind of excitement which has permanence; and that is one which deserves a better name, and of which excitement is rather the shadow than the substance. Its proper name is not excitement but enthusiasm: and enthusiasm, being interpreted, is having God in us; and where God is, there is quietness, and there is strength.

In his *Eothen*, Kinglake describes the following incident, which occurred as he was on his way to the Dead Sea:—'We found that we had bivouacked upon a little patch of barley, plainly belonging to the men of the caves. . . . The saddling and loading of our beasts was a work which generally took nearly an hour, and before this was half over, daylight came. We could now see the men of the caves. They collected in a body, amounting, I thought, to nearly fifty, and rushed down towards our quarters with fierce shouts and yells. But the nearer they got, the slower they went; their shouts grew less resolute in tone, and soon ceased altogether. The fellows, however, advanced to a thicket within thirty yards of us, and behind this "took up their position." My men, without premeditation, did exactly that which was best; they kept steadily to their work of loading the beasts, without fuss or hurry; and, whether it was that they instinctively felt the wisdom of keeping quiet, or that they merely obeyed the natural inclination to silence which one feels in the early morning, I cannot tell; but I know that, except when they exchanged a syllable or two relative to the work they were about, not a word was said. I now believe that this quietness of our party created an undefined terror in the minds of the cave-dwellers, and scared them from coming on; it gave them a notion that we were relying on some resources which they knew not of. Several times the fellows tried to lash themselves into a state of excitement which might do instead of pluck. They would raise a great shout, and sway forward in a dense body from behind the thicket; but when they saw that their bravery, thus gathered to a head, did not even suspend the strapping of a portmanteau or the tying of a hat-box, their shout lost its spirit, and the whole mass was irresistibly drawn back, like a wave receding

from the shore. These attempts at an onset were repeated several times, but always with the same result. . . . We all marched off without hindrance.'

2. Where is quietness to be shown?

(1) There is the quietness of outward circumstances, when we are withdrawn from all the activities of life, and have not strength for any of them; when we have no power for anything, and are obliged to be still. God seems to speak of this kind of quiet when He says, in Hos 2¹⁴, 'I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her,' or, as the margin renders it, 'speak to her heart.' There is a kind, soft, gentle Voice that can speak to the heart when we are withdrawn from the bustle of life. This is what David prayed for when he said, 'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.'

Griffith John was once driven by an angry mob out of a Chinese village, and thus describes his feelings: 'I never felt more calm in my life than I did in that storm. The Saviour was felt specially near as my Strength and Comforter. For about five minutes it appeared as if I were going to die, and yet the prospect did not disturb my peace in the least. When it was all over, I felt thankful that I had been permitted to shed my blood in the cause of Christ, for I had laboured for Him for many years, yet never before had I been called to lose a drop of blood for Him, and the thought brought real sweetness to my soul.'¹

(2) There is quietness of heart. 'Quietness' in this clause appears to correspond to 'rest' in the preceding one. It is not activity, but repose. There are times when the mind is so pulled down by the body that it cannot make even a religious effort. It has no power to give out, and it is scarcely strong enough to take in. All it can do is to rest, and quietly to lean on the loving arm of the Lord; to rest and be thankful.

The gentlest thing in the world will over-ride the strongest.

With virtue and quietness one may conquer the world.
To remain gentle is to be invincible.²

Oh! how safe, how quiet is that state where the soul stands in pure obedience to the voice of Christ, for watchful care is maintained not to follow the voice of a stranger! Here Christ is felt to be our Shepherd, and, under His leading, people are brought to a stability; and where He doth not lead forward, we are bound in the bonds of pure love to stand still and wait upon Him.³

¹ Wardlaw Thompson's *Griffith John*, 359.

² Lao-Tze, *The Simple Way*.

³ John Woolman's *Journal*.

II.

Confidence.

Confidence, says the prophet, is strength. We know that there is a counterfeit confidence which is no strength. There is a vain confidence, and there is a false confidence—a confidence placed in an impostor, or placed in an idol, or placed in self. The confidence which is strength is, first of all, a confidence rightly directed; and secondly, a confidence stoutly held. The confidence of which Isaiah wrote was, of course, set upon God. And then, being thus rightly directed, it was a confidence which knew no wavering as to its right to trust, and as to its acceptance with its Object.

1. What is Confidence? Confidence is the opposite of mistrust. Certainly no one ever thought that mistrust was strength. We all know what mistrust has done in camps and armies; what mistrust has done in houses and families; how it has defeated the best-laid plans, and separated chief friends. We all know that confidence in a great general has carried troops through exhausting marches, and given victory against overwhelming odds; has been the secret of political cohesion, and the explanation of national ascendancy; has given life itself its security, and made the Englishman's house his castle.

Confidence gives moral muscle and sinew to the quietness. It braces and strengthens it, for it links the fortunes of the saved sinner with those of the God who saves him. All the future is provided for. It has been said that half the world is unable to enjoy to-day, because haunted with the guilty memories of yesterday; and the other half, because haunted with fears and anxieties about to-morrow. This miserable existence may come to an end at once and for ever. Isaiah's gospel gives it its deathblow. In returning and resting, there is found God's great salvation, and the past is all forgiven. In quietness and confidence there comes to us, like an inspiration, the assurance that the future is all provided for and absolutely secure in Christ, and that as our day our strength shall be: 'For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.'

Moffat was the right man for the place. Nothing discouraged him, nothing baffled him. He was possessed of an unceasing purpose to do without flinching what he

believed God intended he should do. He had been instrumental in preventing some savage practice, and the angry chief and his picked men came to demand that the missionaries should leave the country. They were armed, and it was evident that they meant mischief. Moffat stood fearlessly before them, closing his reply to their demands with the words, 'Our hearts are with you.' Then he added, as he bared his breast, 'If you will, drive your spears to my heart; and when you have slain me, my companions will know that the hour has come for them to depart.' Such bravery awakened in the savages enough admiration to cause them to leave their intended victims unmolested. 'These men must have ten lives when they are so fearless of death,' declared the chief to his followers. 'There must be something in immortality.'¹

2. And where is our confidence to be placed? Confidence is not faith in a system, but trust in a Person. You have confidence in those about you, so you trust them. You have confidence in a loving Father, and trust Him.

(1) Confidence in His love. When we think of what He has done, and how God loved the world, we may be quite sure that He has loved us; sure also that He who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, will love us unto the end, and will keep us as the apple of His eye.

(2) Confidence in His plans. He has His own plans for us all. He knows exactly what we want, and what is really best for each of us, and He never makes a mistake in planning for our good. So we may rest in the quiet confidence that all that God plans for us is, the very best that could be planned. 'As for God, his way is perfect.'

(3) Confidence in the fulness and completeness of our reconciliation. This lies at the bottom of all trust, and what a noble foundation it is for it! Look at the blood of atonement, the life of the Son of God. Look at the love that prompted it, the sacrifices made in it, and the promises of free forgiveness founded upon it. Think of what God has done and why He did it, and then rest in quiet trust that every sin of the whole life, whether in action or in heart, has long since been blotted out for ever.

Most travellers in the United States have seen the beautiful pass in the White Mountains, known as the Crawford Notch, and have heard the story of the disaster that there befell the Willey family in the autumn of 1826.

The summer had been one of unusual drought. The earth to a great depth was as dry as powder. Then came two days of unprecedented downpour. Thousands of tons of earth and rock were loosed from the overhanging

mountains, and slid with frightful roar to the narrow valley below. The little house of Samuel Willey was in evident danger. In front, separated from it by a bit of pasture, was the towering wall of Mount Webster. Immediately behind the house, for two thousand feet, rose the steep side of Mount Willey. No one knows just when the fatal avalanche came. The family evidently anticipated the danger, probably saw or heard the coming avalanche, for they all met death outside of the house. The entire household of nine persons were killed. But the house from which they had fled was untouched. A sharp ledge of rock above the house divided the downpouring mass of earth and trees and rock into two streams, which passed on either side of the house and again united in front, covering the little meadow with debris thirty feet high. Had they remained in the house, seeing that it was protected by that jutting crag of immovable rock, they would have been safe.

This illustrates Isaiah's ground of confidence, when Jerusalem was in a panic. He knew that the Lord Jehovah, as a strong immovable rock, would protect Zion; and that against Him the Assyrian avalanche would split, and break itself. To forsake Jehovah's protection, and run to Egypt for safety would only put Israel in the track of the destroying avalanche. Therefore, he cried: 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'

III.

Strength.

'In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' This is Isaiah's strong conviction drawn from his vision of the righteousness of God. The prophet had strong feelings; he knew the sweetness of rapturous spiritual experience, he had passed through the agony of conflict and entered into the joy of victory. But he is often seen standing in a position which contrasts strongly with that taken by the people. They are panic-stricken; he can command them to put away their fear and look to God for deliverance. When they are carried away with joy at an unexpected deliverance, a deliverance that he had prophesied, he warns them to prepare for God's searching judgments. In both cases he is working from the same principle; what he calls for is a deeper life. They are faint-hearted in the day of danger because they fear men rather than God; they are carried away by shallow excitement because escape from the foreign foe seems to be the supreme salvation. His strong faith keeps him from being carried away by these surface currents, his feet are on the solid rock, he proves that the man who fears God sincerely and intelligently need fear nothing else. The world is not ruled by clever politicians or successful soldiers, there is a God of righteousness who takes

¹ W. S. Naylor, *Daybreak in the Dark Continent*, 217.

final responsibility on Himself; hence it is only the chaff that the wind drives away, only the wood, hay, and stubble that the fire consumes.

There is a great difference between strength and help. Help is assistance given from without, strength is power imparted within. When it says, He is our strength, it teaches us that He imparts power. If He were to make us so vigorous that we could walk ten miles to-morrow, He would then be strength to our body. And if He were to give us such mental vigour that we could read, and think, and write, and work, then He would be strength to our mind. But, perhaps, He gives us neither the one nor the other. We feel no vigour for either a bodily or a mental effort. Still He is our strength, for He enables us just to lean on His own arm, and trust Him. We have strength for the soul even when we have no strength for the mind or body; for God the Holy Ghost may so bring home to our heart the perfection of our blessed Saviour, the completeness of His atoning sacrifice, and the sufficiency of His High-priesthood, that we may be enabled to lean all our weight on Him, and so be 'strengthened with might by his Spirit,' not in the outer, but 'in the inner man.'

Racket and Rest, by Harold Begbie, closes with the scene in which the widow seeks to convey to her daughter-in-law, Dolly, who has become stone deaf, and whose career had been given to an actress's excitement and racket, the secret of her life. The story tells how Dolly has come to the invalid's room with her baby and her older girl, Dorothea. And when the baby has been sent out with Dorothea, and Dolly is left with her mother-in-law, she says to her—

'I want very much to hear you speak, and I cannot. You don't know how greatly I long to hear your voice.' She bent and kissed the widow's hand. 'When I could hear you,' she said, 'I would not listen. This is my punishment. But you can hear me, and I want to tell you that I am sorry for all the rude things I ever said to you, and very sorry for all the unkind things I ever thought about you.' She kissed her hand again.

The widow's eyes were full of the bright light of kindness. Her lips opened, and she said softly: 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.'

'You are speaking, and I cannot hear you,' said Dolly, lifting her trumpet.

The widow stretched out her hands, drew Dolly down to her, and kissed her brow.

'It would be difficult for you to make me hear,' Dolly said, putting away the trumpet. There were tears in her eyes. For the first time in her life she felt the wisdom of goodness. The death of this beautiful old lady was without tears. Whatever mystery hung behind the dark curtain it could not affright her. She had lived a good life, her heart was pure,

her hands were clean, her eyes were full of sweetness. The end of her life had come. Death was in the room. She was radiant with serenity. Dolly wondered why everybody did not think more often of their death. Death is so certain. Life flies away. It is wise to be good. 'Will you tell Dorothea,' she said, 'when she is alone with you, so that she can tell me afterwards, how you managed in your training of Theodore? You were always kind and loving; but you were also wise and strict. I want to know how you managed. He loved you all through his boyhood, and yet you never spoiled him. You were a perfect mother. I want to be as like you as I can. Will you tell Dorothea? You see how I have altered! I want my little boy to grow up like your son. You have changed me.'

The widow put out her hand towards her Bible, but checked herself, and took a pencil and tablet which rested on a table at her side, and wrote the words:

In returning and rest shall ye be saved;

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.

She did not point out the words in Isaiah, because her fine spirit, her thoughtfulness for others, which lasted to the very end of her life, knew that poor Dolly would be hurt by the concluding words, 'And ye would not.' Her finger pointed to the word 'Rest,' for a long time. Then it moved to 'Quietness' and 'Confidence,' and finally to 'Strength,' where it tarried. Then she gave the paper to Dolly, and smiled into her eyes.

1. This is the distinguishing feature of individual strength, of a strong personality, of a strong *man*, even quietness and confidence. It is this, the reserve power, the hidden strength, the restrained and concealed activity, which makes a great and powerful man. We are mistaken if we think that we are drawn to men, or that they become popular or famous, because of what they do, or of the efforts they put forth. It is not the **straining** or the striving, however successful; it is not brilliant conversation, however sparkling; it is not marked ability, however masterful,—which makes a man great, or makes him loved. It is something far deeper than all these, something in the restfulness of the man, in the quiet confidence of his manner, in the repose of his great spirit which attracts other men to him.

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for winds, nor tide, nor sea;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For lo! my own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

Asleep, awake, by night or day,
The friends I seek are seeking me;
No winds can drive my bark astray
Nor change the tide of destiny.

What matter if I stand alone?
I wait with joy the coming years;
My heart shall reap where it has sown,
And garner up its fruit of tears.

The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave unto the sea;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me.¹

2. This is the secret of strength in a Church. The Church has a great work to do, and of all great enterprises stillness is a characteristic. The ascending water, the descending rain, the revolving planet, the electric current are all illustrative of mighty law combined with mighty stillness. The great upholders of, and sufferers for, our common Christianity have always been the quiet men, the silent people. But the strength of Christ's Church does not lie in quietness more than in confidence. The latter is the cause and condition of the former. God would here expressly teach His people that their hope was faith in God, in taking Him at His word, in preserving their position as God had

¹ John Burroughs.

given it, in receiving by simple faith the strength that He had promised, and in expecting confidently the victory which He had told them would be surely theirs. It was the same truth as St. John taught when he said, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

Dr. J. Campbell Gibson, in his *Mission Problems and Mission Methods in South China* (p. 256), gives the following experience of a persecuted Chinese woman:—

She had been the means of leading her husband to Christ. In the persecution which followed, her husband fled for refuge to the chapel in the neighbourhood; she remained in the village to bear the brunt of the opposition. 'She was not allowed to draw water from the village well. None would sell rice or any food to her; none would speak to her. Her own daughter, when she heard that her parents had burned the family idols, cast them off and would not acknowledge them as her parents. Yet the woman herself testified that during this time of trial she was never cast down. "The Lord," she said, "never left us, not for an hour, else how would these people not have destroyed us altogether? We were being persecuted and hated, yet in my heart there was peace." Her own son took an active part in the persecution, but he too was won at length. Besides her husband, her son, her mother, her younger brother, and two sisters were brought to Christ under her influence. She was afterwards the means of bringing in many more.'

Light upon Early Babylonian History.

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THAT the recovery of the early Babylonian chronological lists, and therefore of the history of the country in primitive times, is far from being hopeless, is proved by the document just issued in the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* for October 1911, where the Rev. P. Scheil publishes a tablet which has recently come into the hands of a private collector. This text gives the dynasties in power before the Gutian invasion, which took place about 2500 B.C.

The text in question must have measured, when complete, about 7 inches long by 3½ in. wide. The writing is large and well formed, and originally consisted of about 29 lines on the obverse, of which 25 remain, and 21 on the reverse, of which 18 remain. The tablet is damaged in places, but the principal harm which it has sustained is the loss of the lower end of the obverse, which has taken away about four lines from that side, and

the beginning of the reverse, with three or four more lines besides. In all, the names of seven kings are wanting at this point, though one of them—perhaps two—can be restored from other sources.

To make the document look complete, a fragment of another tablet, of nearly the same width, and similar as to colour of clay, has been joined on. It is to be hoped, however, that this can be detached without injury to either document, as it is of an entirely different nature, referring, as it does, to certain square roots similar to those published in the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, vol. iv. pl. 37 [40], and by Hilprecht in the *University of Pennsylvania Expedition*, vol. xx.

The text of the chronological list is in Sumerian, and reads as follows:

U^{ti}^(k)-a Un-zi Lugal-am u^{šu} mu in-ak
Un-da-lu-lu ū-mina mu in-ak