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bilities of our complex individual existence that will develop into bud, and blossom, and fruit, as the Holy Spirit works in us, and through us, the will of God. John Wesley's doctrine of assurance still gives us the best working explanation of a forgiven heart, and the 'passion' of a renewed will that can 'publish to the sons of men the signs infallible.'

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ISAIAH.

Isaiah xl. 6–8.

'All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.'

1. A MYSTERIOUS superhuman voice puts this cry into the prophet's lips. It is as though the rush and lapse of time itself became audible, and spoke its message to the thoughtless and fleeting generations of men. There are hours in life, solemn and critical for each of us, at which we are compelled again to hear it,—as when one year, or one century, passes into another, or when our dead pass from our side to their long home. The prophet's cry reverberates along the corridors of time from each generation and age to the next; our vanished years and the centuries of history take up the echo. They proclaim to us with one voice the transience of all earthly things, the abiding worth and undecaying power of the Word of the living God, and the safety and permanence alone of those hopes and interests of mankind which have their foundation and their warrant here. 'All flesh is grass'—brief and frail in duration as the green grass in yon burning eastern clime; and 'the goodliness thereof'—its bloom of beauty, its flush of pleasure, its pride of strength or wealth—more fleeting still, as the flower that withers while the grass is green! The inspired figure is touchingly reproduced by one of our English poets:

> Look at the fate of summer flowers,
> Which blow at daybreak, droop ere evensong;
> And grieved for their brief date, confess that ours,
> Measured by all we are and ought to be,
> Measured by all that trembling we foresee,
> Is not so long!

2. In contrast with the perishing life of the great Empire city and its vast populations, Isaiah points to 'the word of our God.' That Word, he says, will 'stand for ever.' While man, living in the flesh, with his finite being, his limited powers, his decaying strength, recalls the withering grass and the fading flower, the Word of our God rises up like corn in the ear, and is, as it were, embodied before the spiritual eye of man; it neither fades nor withers; it endures for ever; it justifies itself at the bar of history and throughout all time.

3. St. Peter detaches this text from its historical setting, and gives it a universal application. When he reminds Christians that they are born again, and that a regenerate man has a new life and a new standard of duty before him, he adds that this new birth has been effected, 'not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever.' And then he goes on to quote Isaiah with such variations as Apostles, conscious of their own inspiration, often felt at liberty to make when citing the Old Testament. 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And,' adds St. Peter, as if to prevent the quotation from suggesting nothing but historical or antiquarian lessons to his readers, 'this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.'

I.

The Decay of Nature.

1. The simile has a twofold force. It justifies, at first sight, and to a certain extent, the sympathy with human life, with its freshness, variety, beauty, which was felt by captive Israel. What is more beautiful than a single blade of grass, if we look

steadily at it, and if we do not put our foot on it, just because, as has been said, 'there are millions of other blades of grass close by'? There it is, waving gently in the wind, inimitable in its subtle and delicate texture, in its grace, its movement. Do what we will, we cannot reproduce that blade of grass, we cannot even make a copy of it; it is as much beyond our skill as the sun himself. And how mysterious a thing is this blade of grass! When we cross-question ourselves, and have put aside the superficial trivialities that occur to us at first, what do we really know about it? How did it come to be there? It grew from a seed. Why should it grow? What do we mean by 'growth'? What growth is in itself we know not; but we can understand that it is a subtle and energetic force which a granite mountain, for instance, does not contain within itself, and which makes the blade of grass a much higher thing in the scale of being than is the granite mountain. We may think little of growth because we are so familiar with it. But growth, wherever we find it, is a profound mystery; it implies the active energy of life. We men, whatever we have besides, share this faculty of growth with the humblest blade of grass on which we tread; and we are very far from being dishonoured when our life is compared to a thing so full of wonder and beauty.

The goodliness of life is goodly. We need not scorn it because of its frailty, nor trample on the summer flowers because they fade. There is nothing in the Word of God, nothing in the seriousness of religion, which teaches us to despise the wholesome joys of natural life. Oh the goodliness of this fair earth, full in all its regions of the riches of the Lord! Oh the mystery and the glory of starlit skies, the grandeur of mountain and ocean, the splendours of science and of art, the teeming various life that fills land and sea and air! And the goodliness of this our human existence—of childhood with its exquisite freshness and innocent mirth, of youth with its buoyancy and ardour, of manhood with its strength and courage and success, of old age with its chastened affections and ripe wisdom and clustering honours! How much is still left to us, how much is restored by God's pardoning grace, that is very good! How vast the resources of the great Maker and Lord of creation, that He can afford to lavish this wealth of adornment and delight on things which seem born only to die,—that He can 'so clothe the grass which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven!'[1]

2. But the prophet refers to the grass as an emblem of the perishable and the perishing. In looking at it we look on what is at best a vanishing form, ready, almost ere it is mature, to be resolved into its elements, and to sink back into the soil whence it grew. 'The breath of the Lord,' says the prophet, 'has blown upon it.' The action of God the Creator upon the world is, in the Old Testament, often ascribed to His Breath or Spirit pervading His works, and creating, sustaining, destroying life. Of this the emblem and manifestation is the wind; the heavy breathing, as it were, of nature. The Breath of God is, then, in such passages as this, God's action upon nature, whether to create or to destroy; and Isaiah insists that death does not overtake either animals or herbs simply in consequence of the chemical solvents which they contain, but because He who, in His freedom, gave the gift of life, now withdraws freely what He gave; because He dissolves, as He created, by an act of His will. According to the prophet, death, in its calmest and in its most terrible forms, is always arresting life by the fiat of God. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it.'

Only within the last week or so, in my own county of Kent, these very words were made wonderfully clear. The whole country round was covered with the blossoms of the fruit trees, and though their blossoms remained longer than people thought they could have remained, because the weather happened to be colder than usual, and the sun could not shine upon them sufficiently, when there came a few days of sunshine, the very warmth which enabled them to live caused them to fade away, because 'the Spirit of the Lord' had blown upon them.[2]

3. The words of the herald are to be applied, in the first place, to nations; but they may be applied also to individual men.

(1) *Nations.*—The immediate purpose of the words is to reassure the Jews of the Captivity. There they were in Babylon, far from their home, surrounded by the imposing fabric of a great empire, crushed into silent submission by its power, awed, at times half-fascinated, by its splendour. It was to men whose eyes were resting on this scene of magnificence and power that Isaiah spoke, out of another land and an earlier age, the solemn words, 'All flesh is grass, and all the beauty thereof as the flower of the field.' The modern traveller tells us that the 'beauty of the Chaldee's excellency' has 'become heaps'; that her walls have 'fallen,' been 'thrown down,' and 'broken utterly'; that the very site is a wilderness;

[1] George G. Findlay.

[2] J. G. Wood.

that the 'wild beasts of the desert lie there,' and 'the owls dwell there'; that the natives regard the site as haunted by evil spirits, so that 'neither will the Arab pitch tent nor the shepherd fold sheep there'; that, in a word, prophecy has been literally fulfilled. The beauty of human life in this, for many centuries its princely centre, was, after all, but 'as the flower of the field.' 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.'

The simile is elsewhere used by Isaiah in his message to Hezekiah, to describe the completeness of the destruction of the Jewish towns by the Assyrian Sennacherib's invading army.

> Their inhabitants were men of small power.
> . . . . . .
> They were as the grass of the field,
> And as the green herb,
> As the grass on the housetops,
> And as corn blasted before it is grown up.

Nothing is more astonishing than the way in which these feeble solitary men, belonging to a despised people—and themselves often despised amongst their people—confronted the empires of their day and all that proud and ancient civilization. Nothing is more astonishing than the political language of their prophecies,—unless it be the completeness of their fulfilment. Egypt, Tyre, Nineveh, Babylon—names famed then for everything venerable in antiquity, rich in commerce, terrible in war, whose fleets covered the seas and the tramp of whose armies shook the earth when our ancestors were painted savages—where are they, what are they now? They are just what these men foresaw and what we read in their pages, 'a habitation of dragons, a joy of wild asses'; these have been, and are largely at the present time, amongst the most oppressed and impoverished and desolate regions of the earth. Because those great world-empires were built on violence and wrong, and were corrupted by vile idolatries; therefore the prophets of God foresaw their overthrow, and one after another they fell into decrepitude and ruin. He 'blew upon them, and they withered; and the whirlwind carried them away like stubble.'[1]

In Gn 10^{22} Elam appears as the son of Shem—but here was a difficulty. The Elamites of history were not a Semitic, but an Aryan people, and their language was Aryan. Even Professor Hommel, in defending the ancient Hebrew tradition, thought he had to admit an error here. But was there? A French expedition went out to excavate Susa, the capital of Elam, and below the remains of the historical Elam discovered bricks and other remains of an older civilization, with Babylonian inscriptions showing the people to be of Semitic stock; so Elam was, after all, the son of Shem. The passing of one people after another as inhabitants of Susa very strongly resembles the growth of grass and flowers—crop after crop—season after season—but underlying all, the word of the Lord stands unchangeable.

[1] George G. Findlay.

(2) *Men.*—We come now to the more familiar application of the seer's words—the fleeting and unsubstantial tenure of human life. It is a world-old and a threadbare theme, yet one which each open grave, each sudden death, each tale of wide-spread disaster, every tidings of some spread of pestilence brings home to us with a force and a freshness always new. It comes back upon us almost as it must have come home to those who first realized it. It recurs again and again, as we all know, in the whole cycle of human literature. The very image of the text, repeated now by one psalmist and another, now by a patriarch, now by an apostle, is but the Eastern echo of the simple pathos with which Homer compares the passing generations to the leaves which the winds of autumn scatter on the earth.

Even had Babylon been chartered with the promise of eternal youth, Babylonians would have died one after another. That outward form of man's life, which we name civilization, and which exerts so immense an empire over our imagination, does not count for much in the true life of man. The individual man would still be as the grass which withereth, even if the political society to which he belonged were strictly imperishable. In this respect there was no difference between the courtiers of Nebuchadnezzar and the broken-hearted captives who, by the waters of Babylon, sat down and wept when they remembered Zion.

Marie Bashkirtseff, a Russian girl of splendid genius, 'with the ambition of a Cæsar,' her biographer writes, 'smouldering under her crop of red hair,' is dying at twenty-four with less faith than a pagan, and she writes in her journal: 'O to think that we live but once, and that life is so short! When I think of it, I am like one possessed, and my brain seethes with despair!'

II.

The Vitality of God's Word.

1. By 'the word of our God' Isaiah means, in the first instance, the Word of promise uttered in the desert by the inspired Voice. The promise of the return from Babylon, the promise of the presence of Israel's Redeemer, would be fulfilled. The conquerors and oppressors of Israel would pass away. With this imperishable Word of God Israel may comfort himself in his captive hours. The hour of Babylon's fall would be the hour of Israel's liberty. The promise of deliverance rested

on a Will more durable than the walls of Babylon, more invincible than the hosts of Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever present appearances might be; however great the might of Babylon, however few and feeble the heralds of the Divine Word; the one was human, and therefore transient, the other eternal because Divine.

A hundred years ago Lord Chesterfield, while visiting in Paris, was entertained by a lady of distinction, but a bitter foe of Christianity. She said, 'My lord, I am informed that your English Parliament is composed of five or six hundred of the most profound and brilliant thinkers. Will you explain to me why, under their authority, the Bible is still recognized in the legislation of your country, and the obsolete religion of the Nazarene is maintained as the State religion?' He answered, 'Madam, this is a mere temporary makeshift; we are casting about for something better, and when that is discovered the Bible and Christianity must go.'

2. 'But the word of the Lord'—in St. Peter's sense of the term as well as Isaiah's—'endureth for ever.' How do we know that? Not in the same way, certainly, as we know the universality of death. We know it to be true if we believe two things: first, that God, the Perfect Moral Being, exists; secondly, that He has spoken to man. If He is Eternal, that which He proclaims as His Truth and Will will bear on it the mark of His Eternity; if He is true, that which He speaks will bear the impress of His faithfulness.

(1) The Word of our God, which is the gospel, is a source of hope and comfort because *it brings before us the Great Loving Redeemer*, who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us. It tells us of one who 'suffered being tempted, that He might be able to succour them that are tempted.' It points us to Him who died for us, 'that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (He 2^{15}). It tells us of One 'who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities,' and who could say to the trembling soul, 'Fear not; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death' (Rev 1^{18}). It sets before us the great Redeemer standing by the open tomb of Lazarus, and speaking words of comfort to the weeping sister, 'Thy brother shall rise again.' 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.' That was the faith which enabled the patriarch Job, amid all his sorrows, to say, 'But I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.' It was faith in this living Redeemer that enabled the Apostle Paul to say, 'We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (2 Co 5^{1}). It was this faith that enabled the same Apostle to say, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

(2) But, again, the Word of God, which endureth for ever, brings comfort and peace because *it is full of exceeding great and precious promises*, upon which we lean, and through which we are strengthened and refreshed. 'My heart and my flesh faileth,' he often groans, but he can add in faith, 'God is the strength of my life, and my portion for ever.' And these promises contained in God's Word are 'all yea and amen in Christ Jesus,' sealed and ratified with the blood of His Atonement, and 'written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' We need that hope, for we all do fade as a leaf; but God's Word is fitted to the state in which it finds the weary soul, and cheers him with promises of grace and strength in time of need.

What a multitude of meetings, such as none can number, have taken place between men and God through the Word! And just as, in the world, there are certain towns and cities characterized more than others by meetings between parted friends, such as seaports where steamers from the Colonies or foreign parts arrive, so, in God's Word, there are great texts, golden texts, whither many anxious, needy, sinful men and women have come, and there found God as the strength of their life and their portion for ever. There are grand, heart-filling texts, where many, as John Knox put it, have first cast anchor, and have realized how true, in the highest sense may be the poet's line:

Fill my empty heart with a word.

3. But what benefit, it might be said, will it be, even though the Word stand for ever, if men come and go, if all flesh is grass, if we are only

like the grass that grows and withers? What benefit will the Abiding Word be to us in our fleeting life? Ah, but that is only one aspect of human life. It is life in connexion with the world that is fleeting; but there is also a life in connexion with the Word. The Old Testament says: 'All flesh is grass.' The New Testament goes even further, and says, 'The world passeth away.' But, if the New Testament goes beyond the Old in its declaration of the temporary nature of all things earthly, it goes beyond the Old, too, in its manifestation of the permanent view of life. The Old Testament says, 'The word of God abideth.' The New says, 'He that doeth the will of God abideth.' It has a clear and triumphant note for the individual. Yes, if, even as regards the grass, according to the song,

Ilka blade o' grass keps [catches] its ain drap o' dew,

how much more may mortal man find, in the eternal Word that which shall be as the dew to his soul, the refreshing, transfiguring element, not renewing for a brief day only, but enabling to live after the power of an endless life!

Mrs. Carlyle, in one of her letters, writes of revisiting her birthplace (Haddington) after many years' absence. Looking at the signs over the shop-doors as she walked along the streets, she could see but few of the old familiar names. 'Almost all the names had disappeared from the signs, and I found them on the tombstones in the churchyard.' But nothing can supersede the Sign of the Cross. *It* has been connected with the tomb, too, but it is no tombstone it is written upon. It is just because that Name has been connected with the tomb that it lives, and will ever live.

There is in Northern India a spacious city, built by a Mogul Emperor for his own glory, Fatehpur Sikri. It is now absolutely deserted by man. Over a vast gateway in the silent walls is carved an Arabic inscription, which purports to preserve, strange to say, an extra-Scriptural utterance of our blessed Lord's:

> Jesus, on whom be peace, hath said,
> This world is but a bridge; pass over;
> But build not thy dwelling there.

So let us pass on and over, alert and occupied all the way, yet with heart and hope ever in sober earnest looking forward to the life of the world to come.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation in the Creeds.

By the Rev. A. E. Garvie, M.A., D.D., Principal of New College, London.

I.

1. The one question with which this article is concerned is: Whether, and how far, the doctrine of the Incarnation in the Creeds, as they are accepted in the Christian Church, can be regarded by us to-day as adequate and satisfactory. We are not now concerned with these creeds in their historical function as standards of orthodoxy, or as weapons against heresy, except only in so far as these standpoints are necessary to our historical interpretation of them. We may now be of opinion that it is not by such means that Christian faith is to be preserved and defended in our own day; and we may even venture the conjecture that Christendom was divided and so weakened by these attempts to enforce uniformity of belief in the days of old. For our present purpose we must consider these ancient symbols from three points of view—personal faith, historical fact, and metaphysical formula. Do the contents of these creeds express personal faith as we to-day conceive it? Do they accord with historical fact as modern scholarship establishes it? Do they in the metaphysical formulæ employed satisfy the philosophical thought of the modern world? Must Christianity regard itself in its thinking on the object of its faith, the person and work of Jesus the Christ our Lord, bound by the fetters, kept within the borders of the thought of the early Christian centuries; or should it here, too, claim the freedom wherewith the Son maketh free?

2. A glance at the history, although it must be as brief as possible, is inevitable.

(i.) The Apostles' Creed in its present form is first found in the writings of Pirminius, in a manuscript belonging to the eighth century, and so may be dated about 750 A.D. One change has been introduced since: 'ad inferna' has become 'ad inferos' in the fifth article. But the creed can be traced backwards through Rufinus, about 400 A.D.;