

Isaiah 28:15-16 (Jane J. Leake) 131672

Clay and Stone: Babylon the Great and the New Jerusalem, Chapter 5: The Quarry (28:15-16)

"A sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid."—Luke 23:53.

"Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa. 28:15-16).

WHAT a sudden change of subject! Yes; it is sudden indeed, for there is nothing in common betwixt the clay and the stone. Do what you will, you cannot evolve stone out of clay. There must be a new source for the stone, just as there must be a new source for that which in Scripture is morally likened to the stone.

We, like those sad captives of old, have just heard the prophetic song of the inspired apostle as he tells us of the end of the great boastful clay city, and of its temple tower. The roar of its awful judgment is still ringing in our ears. "Overturned—overturned—overturned," is thus written athwart all the boasted power and wealth and glory of the great modern Babylon. But if we thus have gazed on the prophetic end of the clay building in man's sight, let us now see where its glory ended long ago in God's sight. Let us see how, when all apparently was victory for the great Enemy, God gave up the clay and began building in stone. And as we thus take up the new figure which He is pleased to use of His new creation, let us first gaze at it as we find it, as a material substance on the earth.

It was summer weather, glorious summer weather, when I was fortunate enough to find myself far from the crowd and bustle and dust of London, on a wild and rugged coast in the South of England. There were no smooth golden sands on which to walk at low tide, no shingle slopes to make a pleasant music under the breaking waves; but the water dashed itself incessantly, whether the tide was high or low, on towering rocks. I loved to sit on the top of this firm breastwork, and watch the great rollers come one after the other, like a charging host, and rush with a cry of battle on to the stony ramparts, only to stagger back seaward, white with foam, confusing, in the turmoil of their defeat, the advancing ranks behind them. So clear was the water that you could gaze down through its sheen of blue and green on to the seaweed, stones, and fish far beneath:

White sea-birds winged their way athwart the dark blue sky, uttering their shrill cries; wild flowers clustered in every sheltered nook around; and

On I went, luxuriating in the loveliness of our God's wonderful creation— the fair earth that came from His hands so "very good."

Presently I observed a narrow path lying before me, which led down the face of the cliff. It had been cut out of the solid rock, and I gladly scrambled down its rugged footway till I suddenly found myself in a cave. It was not a natural cavern, formed by the upheaving of volcanic rocks, nor had it been hollowed out by the ceaseless rush of wave and storm, but it was an old quarry. Great stones had been wrenched from its sides and roof, by blasting with gun-cotton, and these stones, after being roughly shaped by the quarrymen's tools, had been lowered on to the decks of small vessels, which had carried them away for use. Houses, churches, dockyards, and all sorts of buildings had been formed out of them; and those hills had been honeycombed for miles inland with passages from which that strong, hard stone had been quarried. That quarry cave was a very different kind of place from the clay pit. I could sit down on the stones, I could lean against the walls, or climb about over hard masses still lying within it. Clean and dry and hard, you felt it might be a place of refuge from storm or wind, and that no rushing wave could ever shake it. How firm and hard the rock was! and every piece chipped off the parent rock was firm and hard too, and partook of its strength and character.

What wonderful and beautiful pictures God does use to make us understand His secret things! We are like little children learning in a kindergarten school, and our present lesson book is hard, solid rock. Do you think it will be a very dull lesson? I hope not, and I am sure, if our souls are hungering to know more of Christ, it will be a very useful one.

All was still as death in that quarry cave. No blasts thundered there, no busy tools chipped and squared the debris. The work had been finished; the workmen had deserted it; and I sat me down alone, with the cry of the sea-birds above me, and the moan of the waters below me. I sat me down to think, and my thoughts ran on the wide difference betwixt clay and stone.

But come away with me now to the granite hills of Sweden. Who that has ever seen that rugged, storm-swept coast can ever forget the rounded billows of stone that form its western boundary? Rising out of the clear blue waters of the gulf, they dot the surface of the sea with innumerable islands— some of them formed of sparkling granite, some of cold gray stone, but most of them flecked here and there with patches of vegetation of the brightest green. It is a lovely sight. They stand like sentinels to guard the mainland, and as the steamboat threads her way warily along the tortuous channels between them, you gaze with delight on the ever-varying prospect.

At Stromstad, the border town between Sweden and Norway, those billowy hills are of granite, and lie around the quaint little town like mighty waves turned into stone. It was while wandering among those hills that I came across another quarry. Whenever I paused, I heard from afar the "chick, chick, chick" of tools falling upon stone, alternating with the heavier thud of a hammer; and, attracted by the sounds, I climbed a hill, and looked around me for the busy quarryman. I saw him at last about half a mile away from me, far too busy at his work to notice the stranger who slowly approached him. On the bare bosom of the rugged hills, open to sun and storm, that solitary workman toiled, chipping and shaping with patient care the great boulder-stones that lay about him. I stood and watched the work of his busy hands, as he

wrought with pain and travail to fit each one for its suited place. Its place! Where? To lie there on the wild hillside? No; to form part of a snug little house that was to be built down in the valley yonder, by the rushing ström. I could see the stones and the quarry-man, but not his ideal. The shape and form of the sweet little home to be, was not for me. He had his own ideal, and with chisel and mallet and hammer he wrought on the stones before him.

As I watched him, I stood and pondered, for my thoughts were even then running on God's wonderful object-lessons and the wide difference between the clay-pit and the quarry. The fresh, free air from sea and hill fanned my cheek, the lake lay shining below me, and from it the little river babbled over its rocky bed through the stone-built town, under the shady lime trees, and out into the clear blue waters of the gulf. There, to seaward, as far as eye could reach, stood the white sentinel islands— some green, some bare, but all bathed in the golden sunshine of a glorious summer day. Yet still— apparently unconscious of all the beauties around him, with but one object before him— there toiled that man, and the chick of his tools ceased only when he laid stone after stone aside, ready to be carted to the place chosen for his house. No two stones were exactly alike; they could not be pressed into a mold like the plastic clay; they required no fire to harden them for use, yet each bore a resemblance to its neighbor, each had to be hewn out of the parent rock, and was intrinsically of the same substance with it; each one had to receive individual care and shaping to fit it for the special post which it was destined to fill in the house below— walls, doorsteps, window-sills, coping-stones, as the case might be. So the diligent quarryman worked steadily upon stone after stone, chipping, squaring, measuring one after the other to fit them to the purpose of his mind's ideal.

I left him at his patient toil, and I have no doubt that long ere this a comfortable house near the river has formed a shelter for himself, his wife and family. I left him; but as I walked away my thoughts quitted the hills and rocks, the sea and town, in that northern clime, and centered on a garden under a sultry Eastern sky. There olives grew and palm trees waved, and there in that garden was a cave hewn out of the solid rock. It was a grave—a grave wherein never before had man lain; and there I saw, far back through the ages, a few men and women who, with tearstained eyes, and tender touch, and silent haste, laid a form to rest—a Form wrapped closely in snow-white grave-clothes. I watched as they rolled, with stress and strain, a great boulder stone over the cave's mouth, hiding the dead from view. I watched till the men passed silently away, and two women only stood weeping in bitter anguish beside the mighty stone.

Then away flew my thoughts to the pageantry of a soldier's funeral, where with blast of trumpet and roll of muffled drum, where with waving plumes and booming guns, a great earthly sovereign had lately been laid to rest, while a mighty nation stood by and wept. But this funeral, done in such secrecy, with so much haste, yet so tenderly—with the waving palms for plumes, the moan of the evening breeze for requiem, the dark cypress and the budding olive for spectators, the full moon and the glittering stars for torches— this funeral was the grandest that had ever been on earth. Creation held its breath in silent awe; angels wondered, and demons of the air rejoiced, as the Creator was laid by that handful of His trembling creatures in that rocky grave.

What was being done? I will tell you. God had done with the feeble clay. The One only perfect vessel, never tainted by sin, had allowed Himself to be laid low by the Enemy. At that moment there was no Temple of God upon His own earth. All He had was a grave. The Son of God most high had been committed to that prison cave of His creatures' great enemy— Death.

"The quarry— the quarry!" I murmured, as I stood still to wonder. "Surely that grave wherein never before was man laid was God's wonderful quarry?" The first man was "of the earth, earthy"; the clay-pit was the place of his start. "The second Adam is the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47). Surely there and then, unknown to man, unsuspected by the Zeus Belus of the great city of clay, at the very climax of his supposed triumph, the Voice of God most high was crying, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone— a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." From that grim cave of death, that awful prison-house, the feeble clay had never escaped; but He, the Son of God most high, He rose, "the Living Stone," that there out of Himself, the Rock, might be quarried living stones of Him, like Him, for Him. And for what purpose? For the building of a glorious temple on earth, where God should dwell; every whit of which should utter His praise; and more, for the forming of a mighty kingdom of stone, that should crush the great clay Babylon and her temple tower to atoms, and grow till it should fill the whole earth. And more, for the rearing of a holy city of stones most precious, that, gleaming with gold and shining with light divine, should one day form God's grand metropolis over all redeemed creation.

And I heard as from afar the grand resurrection song: "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength in whom I will trust; my buckler and the horn of my salvation, my high tower.... The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, into His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth.... He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet.... The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the highest gave His voice; hailstones and coals of fire.... He sent from above; He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy; He brought me forth also into a large place; He delivered me, because He delighted in me" (Psa. 18).

That triumphant song was accomplished when, in the quiet hush of the early morning, as the first streaks of gray light shot over those eastern hills, a mighty angel rolled back the great boulder stone from that empty grave, whence Jesus, the Son of God, had come forth in resurrection life, with the keys of death and of hell in His conquering hand. I saw Him stand, with the weeping but now rejoicing Mary falling at His feet. I heard Him say: "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). And then again, later on: "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).

My reverie was over, and, filled with wonder and with awe, I wandered back into the little stone-built town. I went under the shady lime-trees, along by the babbling stream, to the house where I was staying. But often and often since then I have pondered over the thought of the wonderful work that had been done by the bursting open of that grave, hewn out of the solid rock, "wherein never man before was laid." Angels rejoiced and demons of the air trembled, as the Conqueror came forth, a Man, yet victorious. From henceforth the grave was His, and through death He had destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). There, lies open the way of escape from Babylon's confusion, Babylon's doom. There, risen with Christ in spirit, the believer is free from the bondage of will-worship, from the doom of the broken law which hangs over man in the flesh. Clouds and darkness, thunders and lightnings one side; peace and joy and light and song

the other side of that strange gateway.

But there is more than this. Have you ever seen the foundation-stone of a great public building laid? A large and perfect stone is chosen; it is placed in a suitable position to be lowered by machinery to its resting-place. Then the sovereign of the land approaches with all the pomp and show of earthly glory, and with golden trowel spreads the mortar that is to form the bed of the honored stone. A touch, and down it goes to its place, while banners wave, and trumpets blow, and bells ring, and men say, "The foundation-stone is laid; the building is to rise upon it."

God does things differently from men. He does great things very quietly. In the still calm of the night He laid the greatest Foundation-stone that ever has been or that ever can be laid. He chose Zion as the place where He would lay it. Do you know what Zion means? It means Grace, and grace means "free, unmerited favor." Satan had marred the clay vessel in Eden, had broken up the clay nation, had commenced building his grand clay city and tower on the earth; he ruled the world and was its prince and god, and the strength of his position was God's own fiat, that death and judgment must fall on sin. Satan thought he had man fast forever, now that he had hardened the clay against God, and made it defiant to its Creator's will.

The One Perfect Vessel, the Son of man, sinless, bore the judgment due to the world's sin, and put that out of the way; then He was laid in the grave, and came forth "the Living Stone," and so put death out of the way. So that the once prison-house has become the gate of deliverance—the very quarry from whence living stones should be drawn for God's wondrous building. Wonderful to say, that great Foundation-stone was laid in a place where the god of this world could never reach it, for it was laid in Zion, bedded down, so to speak, in the solid Rock of all that God is, laid in grace—free, unmerited favor for lawless and willful man. Death and judgment were left on the other side of that grave, and it had become the gateway, so to speak, out of the great world-system which is under moral darkness", and where Satan tries in vain to rule its wild confusion; into the region of heavenly light and the quiet calm and perfect harmony of divine order.

Do not tell me that this is mysticism. Ponder the scene around you to-day; look at the upheaval of the masses, the materializing of every form of religion, the proud assumption of the creature, the inextricable confusion of all efforts at government. In short, study the Babylon in which you dwell, and from which you must own there is no human way of escape. How is it all to end? Do you say, as so many have said, "I hope it will last my time"; "I hope the great smash will not come in my day"? Better by far listen to the Voice that is calling from heaven: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

Do you ask, "But how can we escape?" Only by God's way, only by coming to Him Who cries, "I am the way." He will teach you of the wonders done on Calvary's Cross, and show you the way through His death to life. But more: He will work a miracle on you, giving you His Holy Spirit, thus changing, so to speak, your moral substance from the hardened clay to the solid stone. Will the Lord Jesus ever fail you, if you come to Him? Never. God says He is "a tried stone." All the fire of Divine wrath against man's sin could not change Him. Nothing could even shake Him. Perfectly subject as Son of man, He was strong as stone as Son of God—the One, the only One, who could resist all the Enemy's power, and on Whom God could build in the midst of that enemy's sphere a Temple untouchable, unpollutable, for His own dwelling-place on earth.

"A Precious Stone!" Ah, "to you which believe He is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). Who, like those who know Him, can say how precious! Precious to God, and precious, unspeakably precious, to every believing soul. And to the feeblest believer God cries, "A sure foundation: he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter 2:6).

His be "the Victor's name,"

Who fought the fight alone;

Triumphant saints no honor claim,

His conquest was their own.

By weakness and defeat

He won the meed and crown;

Trod all our foes beneath His feet,

By being trodden down.

He Satan's power laid low;

Made sin, sin's reign o'erthrow;

Bow'd to the Grave, destroyed it so,

And Death by dying slew.

Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,

Slain in His victory;

Who lived, Who died, Who lives again—

For thee, His church, for thee.

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