

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

The Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace.*

The title of this lesson might stand as the motto of Israel's history, and its spiritual significance is reflected in that of our own Church, "ne tamen consumebatur;" it is again the symbol of the bush which is burned and is not consumed. In Egypt, in Babylon, in later persecutions under Greeks and Romans, the people of God have suffered, but have not been destroyed. The word of the Church, as well as of the individual believer, is the great word of Paul, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Yes, the suffering of the true Church and of the faithful soul is always in a deep sense "the dying of the Lord Jesus." In every age it has been the task of true men to show that there is something more precious than gold, more valuable than popularity, yea dearer than life itself. That men should really believe this, and of set purpose, risk their lives for the truth, is an astonishing thing in the eyes of the world (verse 14). The great emperors of ancient times, who possessed such vast powers, thought that they could control the souls as well as the bodies of men, their consciences as well as their external fortunes. Pilate said to our Lord, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldst have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above." And upon this truth His disciples have rested in all ages; the powers of the greatest Empires are limited by the divine will, the simple, believing soul has behind it the power of heaven. Hence the audacity of faith; a few simple men rise up against Jewish authorities or Roman powers, and by the blessing of God they revolutionize the whole world and change the currents of history. That men should prefer death rather than forsake their God may have been a strange thing to Nebuchadnezzar, but it is now one of the commonplace of history. Christian courage and constancy have made it commonplace. Indeed we owe our civil and religious freedom, the privileges that make the highest life possible to the noble Nonconformists of the past. Without the backbone that is created by a real living faith men have no stiffness to stand up against tyranny, political and ecclesiastical. It is love of country and love of God that have inspired these noble efforts through which the world has advanced to highest freedom and enlightenment. It is good for us to remember that the blessings now so common have been given to us through the toils and tears of men. Here, then, we have simple faith, against the world's supreme power, against the fashion of the times, against the pompous and overpowering ceremonies of a sensual religion. Faith alone against all these; but not alone, for God is there. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Martyrdom is not a matter of accident; men go forward to it with open eyes. Those are not the most steadfast, who with rash eagerness hurry on to catch the martyr's crown. But when godly men are driven into a corner, and are compelled to choose between obedience to the earthly king and the worship of the true King, they know that they can trust God in the darkest hour. Better to face the fiercest fires of persecution and scorn, and even of bodily torment,

*S. S. Lesson, July 16th, Dan. III., 14-28. Golden Text: "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us."

than to bow down to the golden idol. These men are counted fools, but they are the salt of the earth and, under God, the savours of society. Without such men in the great crisis the true religion would be lost; without them men would come to believe that gold is king, that fashion is lord, or the sword supreme. In their presence we learn that there is a holy invisible life, and that for the life of earth men may pay too high a price. They venture all upon God! He vindicates them in His own time and way. The meaning of this wonderful story is that God sustains those who really trust Him, that they can look into the face of kings and into the face of the fire. Luther at the Diet of Worms and John Knox in the French galleys seem to be in a hopeless case, but their work is not yet done; the greatest career that God marks out is still before them. They have companionship in sorrow; the Christ suffers with His people, and is their help and stay. The way in which God delivers His people is a mighty testimony, "Many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." We to-day ought to have a fuller belief in providence than the saints of olden time, the book of history is so much richer, every century supplies new illustrations. But, unless we have the same living faith, all that is written in that book will be in vain; it is not the amount of the writing but the spirit of the reader. Unbelief or shallow faith spends its strength arguing about the form of miracles, when life is still full of wonders which call us to praise the living God. Let us learn, then, that the Kingdom of God cannot be destroyed. Vain attempts have been made to crush the Church and destroy the Bible. Out of every persecution the true Church has come purified and strengthened. But, while that is a great truth, a truth splendidly taught in this lesson, let us remember that there is a sad possibility that we through unbelief, sin and sloth may lose our share in that Kingdom, and it may march on without us to greater triumphs. Unless we can grasp the sacrifice of Jesus in such a way as to become loyal to truth, faithful to God, constant and courageous in the midst of afflictions, our life will wither, and our souls will die. Babylon is still with us, and it will crush us by its strong pretension, and worldly splendor, unless we learn to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Time.

(For Dominion Presbyterian.)

By A. C. R.

It may be said that there are three tenses in this life, the present, past, and future. Of the three the most important is the present, because as a man lives in the present, so will his future be largely determined.

For all practical purposes time may be regarded as being the present.

It is a very valuable possession. It costs nothing to have, but very costly if lost.

It is a gift of God, and should be valued as such. But often it is despised. It flies, and the minutes are allowed to pass unimproved.

Time misused can never be regained.

The following curious advertisement once came under the observation of a traveller;

Lost.

Somewhere between sunrise and sunset,

Two golden hours,

Each set with

Sixty diamond minutes.

No reward is offered as they are

Lost forever.

Thus it is that opportunities unembraced never return. Time misspent is forever lost. Hence it is absolutely necessary that we realize the importance of the present. A good motto for guidance in the right use of time is that of the Scriptures, "Whosoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

It has come to be a truism that a man should live each day as if it were to be his last. If all men did this the world would be transformed. Many things that are now being done would be left undone, and vice versa. Christ's use of time is for our imitation. "Wast ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

These were his words at the age of twelve. During the three years of His ministry He abundantly fulfilled those earlier words. By day and night He labored incessantly on behalf of man.

We should copy His life in this respect. In season and out of season we should be found diligently and faithfully doing God's will, and helping those around us. The duties of life are many and varied. Time should be found for the performance of every religious duty—for daily private devotion, for family worship, for work in the Church of God.

Many men have no time for the service of God in this world, but they will all have to find time to die.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!"

Time, the present, is God's gift to man. Therefore he should use it aright.

"Time was" is past, thou canst not recall, "Time is," thou hast, improve the moment small, "Time future" is not, and may never be—Therefore Time present" is the time for thee.*

A Plea for Faith.

By Mackenzie Bell.

"Tis true amid our earthly life there runs
A tangled thread of strange perplexity
And much injustice; yet comes by-and-by
A nobler state of being, when that which seems
Unjust will be explained or set aright.
'Tis best to hold that there exists a God
Who made man's mind with marvellous powers,
though He

In His deep wisdom limited the scope
Of what He made, wherefore our reason's sphere
Of thought is swiftly reached, and so it seems
To us so frequently that human life
Hath such injustice in its fleeting years.
That He decrees that it is well for us
In humble trust to tread "the path of sorrow,"
Perchance as discipline for some high scheme
Of joy hereafter, or perchance to show
To others how the brave can conquer pain;
That Life's dark mysteries do but transceas,
Not contradict our reason, and when soon
Our earthly life shall close, there dawns a life
When he endows us with new gifts of mind.
Then chief among the pleasures it can give
Will be the thrill of joy when first we feel
That now we understand those mysteries
Which vexed our souls before—when first we
find

That many "themes with which we cannot cope,"
Grow clear, and "Earth's worst phrenzies" are
at length

Forgotten in the joy of Hope's fruition.

Providential Meetings.

We are accustomed to admire the wisdom and foresight that spreads layers of iron ore and layers of coal near each other in the crust of the earth, that the one might give the melting heat which the other needed; but the divine government is a much more minute and pervading thing. The same omniscient provider has appointed each meeting between those who are in want and those who have abundance; and for the same reason that the one may give what the other needs, and that both may be blessed in the deed.—William Arnot.