

THE LESSON APPLIED

The sacred writer now records how a new outlook came to Noah. The unparalleled storm had died down; the waters had subsided; the gloom and terror had passed; and the heart of the grateful Noah leaped for joy when he beheld a beautiful rainbow in the heavens. Then the Lord assured him that man should henceforth live undisturbed by the fear of a recurrence of the deluge disaster.

(1) This is the Hebrew way of declaring the stability of nature's laws. The writer did not think of nature as a gigantic but dead machine that kept itself going forever. No, he knew that back of the flour is the wheat, and back of the wheat are the sun and the rain, and back of these is the Spirit of God. The loving providence of the Almighty is over the sparrow, and over "the grass . . . which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven." This is God's world, and His everlasting arms are beneath it.

(2) Another lesson was brought home to Noah's conscience,—the sacredness of all life, and especially human life. A new regulation was announced for the protection of human life. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." To quote Dr. Marcus Dods, "civil government and criminal law began." Yet how cheap we still hold human life! Perhaps we are realizing more keenly than before the extraordinary value that God attaches to the human soul, and that appreciation is sending out missionaries to the heathen, suggesting many ameliorations of the lot of the unfortunate and unhappy, and sharpening the conscience of the church toward the needy and ignorant and oppressed everywhere.

But so much is to be done yet! An anarchist blows up a building, and sends a score of innocent people into eternity, as the McNamara brothers did in Los Angeles; an automobile dashes along the street at a mad rate and a little child's life is crushed out; the train rushes over the deadly level crossing and the newspapers record a tragedy; the mad desire to break all records wrecks the Titanic, and the world is shocked at this blasphemous loss of human hope and energy

and love. Yet we allow slums to grow up in our cities, and crime to fester in these resorts; we allow the bar to tempt our boys and slay them; we permit inhuman and unnatural agencies to entrap our girls and kill them.

We must take to heart the old lesson of the inestimable value of human life. It is not the will of God that one of these little ones should perish.

"For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

So the Lord established a covenant with Noah, and the sign of the covenant was the rainbow. The bow did not now come into existence for the first time. Bread and wine were familiar articles before Jesus constituted them the symbols of a sacrament. Similarly Noah was instructed to look with new eyes on the beautiful bow, and to recognize in it a new significance. Henceforth it would speak to him of the divine mercy and kindness.

(3) We may do well to remember that the bright bow always appears in the life of the humble Christian man. The psalmist tells us (Ps. 124) that the proud waters would have gone over his soul, had he not known that the Lord was on his side. "The torrent of affliction may swell and rise, and toss the heart on its heaving bosom; but God sits above the flood enthroned forever, and under His restraining hand it is not suffered to overflow or deal utter ruin. This is the message of the rainbow—that smile set in the still frowning heavens. The rainbow is a child of the storm. It springs out of the conflict between light and darkness; it is caused by the sun of heaven shining upon the fast dripping tears of earth. It needs the fast falling tears of sorrow and sadness below, but it needs also the sunshine, the light and the glory from heaven above.

"Through gloom and shadow look we
On beyond the years;
The soul would have no rainbow
Had the eyes no tears."