

is not the past of their dead, of which they know more than others, but their future. It is unspeakably sad to realize that scepticism has nothing but emptiness to offer, and this lack of a message at a solemn time like the present is the most terrible indictment that can be uttered against it, for it means that when the hungry heart cries out no consolation is possible. In this time of sorrow we doubt not that many will remember the utter helplessness of scepticism, for when the war is over and sceptics renew their efforts to lead people from Christ, there will be nothing more telling than the reminder of this utter hollowness and dissatisfaction in the most acute and trying moment of life. Meanwhile, it is an opportunity for Christian people, such as they have scarcely ever had before, to point sorrowing souls to the one and only source of satisfaction: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

A Welcome Rebuke.

A well-known man in the United States is Colonel Halford, who was Secretary, years ago, to President Harrison. He has been speaking during the recent campaign of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, and on one occasion, when he was to address a large meeting, the leader, knowing the Colonel to be a life-long Methodist, thought it would be profitable to create a surcharged Methodist atmosphere with some rousing songs before the distinguished visitor began to speak. Evidently he could not have known the precise tone of Colonel Halford's religion. When the time came, the chairman said: "Now let us sing, just specially to welcome Colonel Halford, 'The Old-time Religion.'" So the young folks began:—

"It's the old-time religion,
It's the old-time religion,
It's the old-time religion,
And it's good enough for me."

And they followed it through a very long number of verses, such as can be found in one of the Hymn Books, singing that this old-time religion was good enough for father, for mother, and for a score or more of ancient people. Then Colonel Halford was introduced, and after thanking the young people for this wonderful welcome, he added: "There is one respect in which your singing has come short; there is really another verse which ought to be added to the hymn, and I hope in singing it hereafter you will never omit it. That final verse runs this way:—

"This is neither sense nor music,
This is neither sense nor music,
This is neither sense nor music,
But it's good enough for me."

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Although there is no real difference between December 31 and January 1, we cannot help being conscious of a great change as we pass from one year to another. The close of the old year and the beginning of the New is a natural and helpful opportunity for reviewing the past and contemplating the future, and it is well that we should "take stock" in this way, remembering all our failures in the past and realizing both our need and the assurance of Divine grace for the future.

As we open another year it may help us to ponder some of the New Years of which there is a record in Scripture, for, as we contemplate what was done on similar occasions we can thereby see something of our duty to-day. The

first of these is thus stated: "In the first month, the first day of the month . . . Noah removed the covering of the Ark . . . and behold! the face of the ground was dry" (Gen. 8:13). This was a new commencement after a time of sorrow, sin and judgment. There was nothing between Noah and the bright skies above him, and on this account it must have been a memorable day for him and those with him. The past was for ever settled and he and his family were looking forward to a fresh commencement under new conditions with the assurance of the Divine grace and blessing. Everything that hindered the fullness of God's light from streaming upon him was removed, and the sunshine above him might well be taken as a symbol of the bright light that must have filled his heart as he contemplated what God had done, and what the future would be in the presence and by the mercy of the Lord. That is always a happy day for the believer when there is nothing to cast a shadow on our daily life. Our eyes should be and may be ever looking unto Him Who is our light, the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we not take this opportunity of the New Year to remove all that hinders the full sunshine entering into our souls? This is what God desires for us (1 Pet. 2:9), and it should be our desire and determination as well. The familiar words so often sung constitute a fitting prayer for the New Year:

"O may no earth-born cloud arise,
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes."

Another New Year's Day is noteworthy. "In the first month, the first day of the month . . . the Tabernacle was reared up" (Exod. 40:17). That was a memorable day in the history of Israel. They had been redeemed from Egypt, rescued out of bondage and protected by means of the great Passover sacrifice. They had been led step by step along the pathway, guided and guarded by God until they had arrived at Sinai, where they were taught the Divine will and shown what was expected from them. Then came the revelation concerning the Tabernacle, which was to be the centre of their national life as the place of worship and the guarantee of faithfulness to the Divine covenant. The sanctuary which they had prepared according to the commandment of God was intended to be the heart and soul of their national life, where they should approach God and come to know Him and His ways with the assurance of His guidance and protection. The Tabernacle stood for at least four things which are all spiritually true to-day of the Church as a whole and of each individual Christian. It was the place of worship and we too must realize the presence of God. It was the place of instruction, and we too must accept the revelation of the truth of God. Then the Tabernacle was the place where people were to hold fellowship with God, and it is for us to-day to receive the grace of God. It was also the place of testimony to God and it is for us to reproduce His will and show it by lip and life. The New Year should reveal to all the fact that God is dwelling in us (2 Cor. 6:16), that we have our place of worship and fellowship (Heb. 10:19) and know ourselves to be under the instruction, guidance and power of God. The Tabernacle was reared by human hands and if only we offer ourselves to God, He will dwell in us, the source and centre of our life day by day.

Another New Year's Day was associated with a later event of much interest in the history of Israel, the Reformation under Hezekiah. "They began on the first day of the first month to sanctify" (2 Chron. 29:17). Sanctification primarily means separation or consecration, and that which was done by Hezekiah and those associated with him is essential to-day in individual and Church life.

It is for us to separate ourselves from all else and to dedicate our lives entirely to the Lord. Wherever sanctification is found in Scripture the fundamental thought is always that of consecration to God, involving separation from everything known to be wrong and at the same time a complete surrender of the heart and life to Him. This is the meaning of the well-known words concerning our Lord, "for their sakes I sanctify myself" (John 17:19). He separated, dedicated, consecrated Himself in order that we too might be similarly devoted to God. It is well for us to remember this root-conception of Sanctification and its cognate words. A "saint" in the New Testament is one who belongs to God, and therefore the "Communion of Saints" means the fellowship of those who are consecrated to God, who are His property, His own possession. No time of the year could be more appropriate than the commencement on which to realize the absolute necessity of devotion to God. "Here we offer and present ourselves unto Thee."

Yet again, we read that Ezra "upon the first day of the first month began to go up from Babylon" (Ezra 7:9). It is interesting to notice that he signalized this New Year's Day by turning his back on the great city of Babylon. He and others like-minded, who knew and loved the Word of God, took their courage in their hands and left the fascination of that city and crossed the desert in order to reach their native land. This is the true pilgrim spirit, and if any of us are still tempted to remain in any form of Babylon, it will be well for us to turn our back on it at this time, and, realizing that we are pilgrims, take definite and straight path to our native land (Heb. 11:14). The blessing that rested upon Ezra and his companions will assuredly be ours if we follow his steps. The word is clear, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). The believer with a single eye to God's glory and a heart that can rest on the Divine promises will never be left alone. True faith is fully assured of guidance and protection as we leave Babylon for the city of God.

Thus we may think of New Year's Day and its messages. But there is still waiting for us another and infinitely more wonderful day, when there will be a new heaven and the new earth, and indeed "all things new" (Rev. 21:5). This will be the day of days for all those who take the Word of God as the lamp to their feet. They are able to say with assurance, "Our feet shall stand within Thy gates, O Jerusalem!" And so may this New Year on which we enter be the very best we have had in regard to all those things which constitute true Christian living; a new start like Noah's, a new fellowship like Israel's, a new consecration like Hezekiah's, a new pilgrimage like Ezra's, and then we shall enjoy ever-increasing fellowship with our Lord in daily living and realize something even now of that time which will be ours when the day dawns and the shadows flee away.

THE CHANGING YEARS

Across the threshold of the year
I dare not step without a guide,
Oh, let me feel Thy presence near,
And know Thee ever at my side.

So many foes on every hand,
So many snares laid for my feet,
Left to myself I cannot stand,
To trust in self, but courts defeat.

But with Thy strong hand clasping mine
The future I can calmly face;
Strong in the love that made me Thine,
And leaning wholly on Thy grace.

Thus shall my way still brighter grow,
Life's trials tell me all Thou art,
Till with Thee I more fully know
The wealth of Thy great loving heart.



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