

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

THE EPITAPH OF PAUL*

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The words of the "Golden Text" for this week's study are the brief review which Paul, in the anticipation of threatening death, makes of his life and his work. They sum up his whole character.

As was stated last week, they refer, not to warfare, but to competition in athletic sports. The Hellenic peoples, among whom his Gentile churches were founded, were very fond of such sports, which formed a recognized part of the education of every boy, and were carefully regulated under trained medical guidance. Victory in the great international competitions was regarded as the highest of distinctions, not merely for the successful athlete, but for the city to which he belonged; and, in that keenly contested arena, victory could be gained only by the most intense and concentrated effort following on a long preliminary period of training according to very severe rules. The rules of the course and of the preparation for it were rigidly enforced by the judges who regulated the competition and decided the prize. Competitors who had not strictly complied with all the rules were disqualified remorselessly. To win the prize, not merely must one be first: one must attain that position in accordance with stern laws and regulations.

In a series of metaphors drawn from this side of Hellenic life, Paul finds the description which will best explain to his readers (not merely Timothy, but all the Ephesian church) the intensity and the long course of concentrated application which characterized his life and the life of every Christian. "I have competed in the honorable contest: I have run the race to the winning post: I have observed the rules which regulate the race-course of Faith." Paul was the typical man, the typical human Christian. Our life, just like his, must be one long struggle onward toward a goal. We can maintain the struggle only by strict discipline, and the observing of all the rules, as he did. We reach the goal and win the prize only in the hour of death, as he reached it. The struggle ends only with our life; it must be maintained to the end. The prize is not in this life or of this life; but it can be won by all who persevere to the end.

Such is the whole life of Paul. He was an eager competitor from the beginning to the end. Before he learned what Christ was, when he hated him and persecuted all his followers, he was already struggling on in his ignorance and blindness toward the knowledge of God and of truth. He was even then a leader of men, a preacher, a missionary eagerly bent on bringing others to the truth as he believed it. On the road to Damascus, near that city, he saw with his own eyes the Jesus still living whom he had believed to be a dead impostor. The direction of his efforts was changed from that time onward. He knew now where the truth lay; and the same devouring enthusiasm, the same concentrated energy, which he had before ignorantly applied in a misdirected course, he now applied to the spreading of his better knowledge. He had to face a constant succession of difficulties, as we must in our life. He was always misunderstood and suspected by many, as the strenuous reformer will always be. But he always found devoted and zealous friends, as the true and honest seer after know-

ledge always finds them, friend, ready to guarantee his honesty with their credit and their life, ready to believe in him even where appearances were against him, and to help him in all his difficulties. All men who work unselfishly for the good of the world, all who try to achieve something noble and generous in their life, all who live for a high ideal, will turn with growing interest and admiration to the career of Paul; and will find mirrored in it the best side of their own nature.

When he first came to Jerusalem, after his conversion, the disciples were afraid of him, for they could not believe in his truth. Barnabas helped him, became his champion, and guaranteed his good faith. Then he disputed against the Hellenist Jew, his own former friends (since he too was a Hellenist Jew); but they went about to slay him. He had to flee from Jerusalem. He lived many years a life that was undistinguished, while he was learning the Christian missionary's life by living it, the only way in which it can be learned. This was his apprenticeship, in which there seems to have been little success, for Luke records nothing. At last Barnabas brought him to Antioch; and there he found friends and associates, but still he ranked last among the leaders. He was then sent forth by the Spirit along with Barnabas to a new work in the West; and in the prosecution of his work he had to part from that dear and tried friend, who was not prepared to do all that Paul believed necessary for success in their joint career. He had to choose between his work and companionship with his best friend. He chose his work; but the cost was great.

This is the sorest trial of human life. It is not only our unsympathetic opponents who misunderstand us. Sometimes even our friends differ from us, disagree with our views, suspect and disapprove of our aims and course of life, and part from us. We have to choose between friendship and truth; the hardest choice in life. Are we quite sure that we are right in our view? May we not have mistaken our course? Shall we be justified in breaking the bond of true companionship? With that question comes doubt and anxiety, perplexity and almost despair.

As we see that Paul's life mirrors our trials and struggles, so also we may hope to gain some of his consolations and rewards. He attained to many revelations of the nature and will of God. In those revelations he found the highest glory of his earthly life. They were a sacred possession, of which he could not speak much, but which he kept deep hidden in his heart. We are not denied such revelations. We too may have moments of insight and inspiration, in which we attain to direct communion with the Divine Nature and to sympathy with the purpose and will of God, — moments in which the Truth seems to unveil itself to our gaze. Those moments are brief and interrupted. We cannot remain long on that high level; but we see that to Paul also those moments of inspiration were discontinuous. The prize, the crown of life, came to him only with death.

While we see in Paul the man who struggled through error toward truth, we recognize in him also the highest type of man. We never understand him until we begin to judge his conduct on the highest plane of human action. If we look on him from this point of view, then the longer we study him the better we appreciate the loftiness of his motives, his unselfishness, his noble and generous spirit in judging the world, his frankness in condemning all wrong doing and wrong thinking, his courtesy and delicate consideration for the feelings of others, his patience in pleading with them.

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WHOSE HOUSE?

G. Campbell Morgan says: "My father came into my house soon after I was married, and looked around. We shovled him into every room, and then in his rough way he said to me: 'Yes, it is very nice; but nobody will know, walking through here, whether you belong to God or to the devil.' I went through and looked at the rooms again, and I thought: 'He is quite right.' So we made up our minds straightway that there should be no room in our house, henceforth, that had not some message, by picture or wall text, for every corner which should tell that we at any rate serve the King."

THE SOURCE OF MISSIONARY
ZEAL.

In vain do we seek to awaken in our churches zeal for missions as a separate thing. To be genuine, it must flow from love to Christ. It is when a sense of personal communion with the Son of God is highest, that we shall be most fit for missionary work; either to go ourselves, or to stir up others. It we allow it to become a business of dollars and cents, we shall see no results. "Find preachers of David Brainerd's spirit," said John Wesley, "and nothing can stand before them; but without this, what can gold or silver do?" Let gushing affection to the Lord Jesus Christ become the ruling passion, and it communicates the thrill of evangelical zeal to every member of the electric chain.

—Dr. Alexander.

LOVE.

What is love? It is absolutely indefinable. Take down the dictionary; that does not go beneath the skin. If you put your analytical finger on love, where would you begin? Young people in love, where would you begin? The biggest thing in love, I tell you, is purity. There can be no love without it. Love at the heart of God is incorruptible holiness.

Here is the difference between sentiment and sentimentalism. Sentimentalism deals with love that has no holiness in it. Sentiment is pure. Sentiment goes above the snow line. Sentimentalism stays at the base. "The fear of the Lord is clean." Sentiment is not afraid of God. Love is holiness on the march to the unholy to make it pure.

Because love is holy, love is sensitive. Only the pure are sensitive. Every step into impurity is a step into insensitiveness. "The wages of sin" is numbness. It is the clean that is quick, the impure obtuse. Were I superlatively holy, I should feel everything. "See if there be any sorrow like my sorrow." "I have trodden the winepress alone." Because love is holy, love is sensitive, and because love is sensitive, love is also redemptive. You can never measure your holiness by your recoil from sin. Holiness is aggressive. It operates upon the sin which it stands aside from. It casts it upon it in order to make it pure.

Because love is holy, sensitive, redemptive, it is also sacrificial. "He loved me and gave himself for me." He came to my house of bondage to set the bondsman free.—Jowett.

Look round the habitable world, how few
Know their own good, or, knowing it,
pursue.
—Dryden.

Fidelity is the sister of justice.—
Horace.
Mercy turns her back to the unmerciful.

*S.S. Lesson, December 19. Fourth Quarterly Review. — Golden Text: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.—2 Tim. 4:7.