

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

Varied Scenes in a Nation's Life.*

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The Old Testament is very largely the history of a nation's life written from the religious stand-point. It implies the great truth that religion is and always has been of supreme importance in the national as well as the individual life of man. The lessons covered in this brief review particularly suggests this; they show us the two forces of religion and patriotism beautifully blended and moving toward one purpose. The words "Bless the Lord O my Soul and forget not all his benefits" are specially suited to this review, and to the retrospect which naturally comes on the last Sabbath of another year. We, like the ancient Jews, can look back and say: "Thou hast led us by a way that we knew not of." "Thou hast not taken away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people." "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places. We have a goodly heritage." As we learn, the social and religious life of the Jew which served as a preparation for Christian was the result of a slow toilsome progress under the guidance of divine providence. It is well for us to remember that the same principles have been at work since the time of our Lord and that our best social possessions and privileges have come to us through the toil and tears of noble men and women who in dark days have kept alive the spirit of faith and shown their loyalty to God and the Church. Those who fought these great battles lived according to the principles set forth in these lessons, and we may now appropriately call attention to the most important of them.

1. Joy in the House of God, reverence for the sanctuary as a centre of life and source of inspiration. "I was glad when thou said unto me let us go unto the house of the Lord." We have this extensively in Canada. We may well ask do we possess it intensively, or in other words, is our worship as pure and intelligent as it ought to be and as powerful in its application to social life. In the Psalm which celebrates the glory of God's house we are told that they are set themes for judgment. To the ancient Israelite, worship meant personal purity and civil righteousness; it cannot mean less to us who have received through our Lord still nobler thoughts of worship.

2. In Esther's position and efforts for her people we have brought out strongly the thought that prominence in political and social life is not to be regarded for mere selfish use. In a truly religious and patriotic nation there is to be no such thing as separate castes. In a sense we all advance together and suffer

together. If God has given to any of us higher position and separate privileges, these are to be held in trust for the common weal. A nation that has God on its side is strong, but a nation cannot expect to have God on its side unless its leaders are prepared to work and suffer for righteousness. A man once spoke to Abraham Lincoln about God being on their side and the great man said "You take care that you are on the side of God." Yes, that is the great need—to be on the side of righteousness and liberty; then God will give strength and make peace.

3. In Ezra 8. 22. There is a nobler passage which represents this noble trust in God. It needs little exposition; its meaning is plain and it is full of pathos. "For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken to the king saying, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him for good." How beautiful is the noble shame lest the good name of God should be dishonored.

4. After this we may well read the Psalms of deliverance, 85 and 126, and learn that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy. Men sow as they reap and those who know the tears of penitence and the prayers of patient trust shall reap a great deliverance and an abiding blessing. The greatest things have come to humanity in this way. It is through the hours of strain and sacrifice that the greatest blessings have come to the God-fearing nation. In times of ease and prosperity life has become shallow and worship formal. It is through adversity, through our defeats and disappointments that we feel our great need of God and turn to him in a true seeking spirit. After such sincere turning and prolonged seeking the real songs of gladness come and the sanctuary is alive with a holy joy.

Then follows practical work as exemplified in the career of Nehemiah. He also is a man of prayer and a great statesman and a successful leader, because his work is done for God as well as for man. He can live up to high principle and take a firm stand for righteousness because his life is deeply rooted in God and his attachment to Jerusalem is no small party zeal. These are the subjects that have been brought before us in various forms and that are, as we have said, specially suited to the closing day of another year. The days die away, the years roll around, but the word of our God and the principles of true religion abide forever.

Oh, star that led to him whose love
Brought down man's ransom free,
Where art thou?—mild the hosts above,
May we still gaze on thee
In heaven thou art not set,
Thy rays earth might not dim;
Send them to guide us yet,
Oh, star that led to Him!

—Felicia Hemans.

The Christmas Worship.

The first act of worship accorded the infant Saviour was giving. The wise men declared that they had come to worship the new king. "What did they do? Did they pray? We call praying an act of worship, and so it is. Did they sing? We call singing an act of worship, and so it is. Not by prayer nor by sacred song did they first worship the Christ; but "when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh." Giving was the first act of worship paid by mortal man to the Son of God. And giving to him is true worship still. The contribution plate is never an interruption of worship, but a very important part of worship. Those who object to it would have felt strangely out of place with the Magi in their worship of the Christ, a scene over which the holy angels hovered!—Christian Observer.

Christmas.

The year keeps its best holiday until the last. Other days may be bright with June skies, or rich with autumn colors; or they may be charged with personal meaning as they mark birthdays or other anniversaries, or they may be big with national significance as they commemorate historic events; but greater than all these is the day we are soon to celebrate. Its skies may be sombre and its leaves all dead, but it marks the greatest event of all time and hides in its heart the greatest joy. Its meaning is more than personal or national, and its joy overflows all lines and in some degree floods the globe. It is celebrated on more continents and islands and by more millions of people than any other, and rises into the grandeur of a cosmopolitan day. The great world knows deep down in its heart that this day, beneath all its merrymaking, means more for it than any other on the calendar. Christmas is the diamond of days, and it is fitting that the year should bring it forth as its finest gem to sparkle on the robe of its departing glory.

Christmas differs from the other holidays in that it has a spiritual significance. National anniversaries mark events that are associated with war and victory, and they are fittingly celebrated with martial music and the firing of guns. But no blood was shed and no victor was crowned on the day we are about to observe. Only a child was born, and it seemed to be only a common child. It was not wrapped in silken apparel or royal purple and laid on a downy couch as a child of wealth or noble lineage, but it was wound in a coarse swaddling cloth and laid in a stone manger. No glory gleamed from its flesh as though divinity were streaming through its humanity. Its appearance presented nothing extraordinary and unique, but it looked like any other child. Yet that Child was unique and extraordinary and was verily the Son of God come into the world. God gave his greatest and best gift to men when he gave them that Child.—The Presbyterian Banner.

How often does human selfishness bar the windows of heaven against which divine blessings, both spiritual and temporal, press heavily!

*S.S. Lesson for Dec. 31st.—Review.

Golden Text—"Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all His benefits."—Ps. 103 2.