

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

The Christ Crucified.*

Three times in John's Gospel these words fall from the lips of Pilate: "I find no crime in Him," (xviii. 38, xix. 4, 6) and the last time he uttered the fatal words, "Take ye Him, and crucify Him." Thus declared by Pilate to be without crime, and by Judas to be the innocent one, the Son of Man goes bearing His cross, doomed to end His life on the shameful tree, a tree planted by the sin of man. These closing scenes are given with much fulness by all the Evangelists; their simple, dignified story presents the strangest, most tragic spectacle in the whole realm of literature. Devout men do not need to be reminded that these things were not written for striking dramatic effect, to create a moral impression, or to appeal to our pity. But the fact that they are written so fully in a book that is marked by its reverential reserve shows their deep spiritual significance. Here is the mystery of atonement of which our intellectual system can give no complete explanation.

The Crucifixion and the Title.—The place of a skull refers to the form of the ground; it was a knoll or little hill outside the city wall, but near to the city, "the green hill" of which the poet has sung with such tender simplicity. Thither Jesus was led, bearing a cross for Himself; but soon exhausted human nature needs help in that sad exercise. "His own received Him not," those who received Him from Pilate did so that they might inflict this shameful suffering. "There they crucified Him," the sinless One crucified with and for sinners. The leaders of the Church had ranked Him with sinners and outlaws, and there he is placed by Pilate's orders. The King in the midst, it has been well said that the whole of humanity is represented here. "The sinless Saviour, the saved penitent, the condemned impenitent." Many things were here said and done in bitter irony which represented the very deepest truths. The title on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," is prophecy, as well as the fulfilment of prophecy, and when it is put in the three great languages of the ancient world it suggests universal sig-

nificance and abiding dominion. This may have sprung from Pilate's desire to annoy the Jewish rulers, but it shows that in a very real sense that they knew not what they did. Pilate would cast a little cheap satire and then forget the unfortunate victim, and little thinks that there is decreed for himself an infamous immortality by association with the name of the Nazarene. The rulers remonstrate and point out how, according to their taste, the inscription can be improved, but they receive a curt reply, in which there is more than meets the ear, "What I have written, I have written;" how true of Pilate's life and of our own. These people have written the judgment of Jesus, and it goes down to an irrevocable eternity. It is done, it is too late for new judgments and revised readings, it must abide for coming generations to read in the strong light of the world's history, and with the interpretation that will come from the life of the risen Christ.

The subordinate actors in the great drama play their part in the same spirit; the homage of the rude soldiers to this King takes the form of parting His garments among themselves in a scornful spirit; that which cannot be rent without being spoiled is gambled for. The good Samaritan is Himself treated as one who has fallen among robbers. Though they know it not they are helping to complete a picture of the righteous Sufferer written centuries before. Whether Psalm xxii referred originally to the nation, or to an individual, its true fulfilment is in Jesus. He is the true Israel, the real suffering servant. This the Evangelist did not understand at the time, but it came to him afterwards under the teaching of the Divine Spirit; the soldiers would have said that they did it for sport, but, to the disciple whom Jesus loved, there is no sport in this grave matter, it is the working out of God's decrees and the fulfilment of Israel's deepest life.

If enemies and scoffers gathered round the Cross, friends of Jesus were not far away. Women were there, "first at the Cross and first at the tomb," and the thoughts of Jesus in the last sad hours were for them. It shows at the same time His care for His mother and His confidence in John. When He is gone she will still need care, and the beloved disciple is appointed to that filial duty. The words of Simeon are now fulfilled, the sword has pierced the mother's heart also. She is encompassed by human limitation and cannot fully

understand why her Son should be taken away in the fulness of His youthful manhood. But this is not the time for theorizing, she can only bear in patience her part of the Cross; she must suffer and wait.

With two words from the Cross the lesson closes, "I thirst," and "It is finished." It was real agony, the painful thirst which accompanies feverish suffering, though it is perhaps no great strain to apply it, as some have done, to His eager longing for man's redemption. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." He meets death willingly, and calmly looks it in the face. He refuses the drug which was given in mercy to suffering criminals, but accepts the reviving drink. He will not go down to death in heavy stupor, but for our sakes will fathom all its meaning, and proclaim his victory. "It is finished," it is all over now, the long life of faithful toil, the conflict with man's hard stupidity and cruel bigotry, the enduring the contradiction of sinners, the sacrifice of life and death, the service of humanity, the obedience to the Father. He can now look up and say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Yes, in a very real sense the work of Christ is a "finished work," but ere it finds its final fulfilment it must enter into our lives. Before we can bear the cross we must cling to the Saviour's Cross, we must appropriate by faith the work that was perfected on Calvary, and then we shall find through it our perfecting. A real faith in it brings the spirit of it into our souls and makes us in our small way helpers of mankind.

There'll Come a Day.

By Margaret Preston.

There'll come a day when the supremest splendour
Of earth, or sky, or sea,
Whate'er their miracles, sublime or tender,
Will wake no joy in me.

There'll come a day when all the aspiration,
Now with such fervor fraught,
As lifts to heights of breathless exaltation,
Will seem a thing of naught.

There'll come a day when riches, honor, glory,
Music and song and art,
Will look like puppets in a worn-out story,
Where each has played his part.

There'll come a day when human love, the sweetest
Gift, that includes the whole
Of God's grand giving—sovereignest, completest—
Shall fail to fill my soul.

There'll come a day—I will not care how passes
The cloud across my sight,
If only, lark-like, from earth's nested grasses,
I spring to meet its light.

Religion is a personal thing—an individual concern; for every one of us must give an account of himself to God, and every man bear his own burden—
Robert Hall.

*International Sunday School Lesson for June 4th., John xix., 17-30. Compare Matt. xxvii., 27-54, Mark xv., 16-39 and Luke xxii., 33-47. Golden Text, "The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."—Gal. ii., 20.