

# The Quiet Hour

(For Dominion Presbyterian.)

## Nehemiah's Prayer.\*

By Rev. Prof. Jordan, D.D.

Nehemiah impresses us as being in the highest sense a strong man—a man who was intelligent, devout and earnest. Like all other men, he bears the marks, and is hampered by the limitations of the time in which he lives; but as to his spirit and purpose, he was in the fullest sense a noble patriot, a man who sacrificed mere personal interests for the sake of Church and country. In other sections of the book which bears his name, we see examples of his masterful energy and practical wisdom; here we note the deep sources of his life, its strong religious and patriotic feeling expressing itself in pleading, patient prayer. He was at this time, we are told, in the last clause of the lesson, "cup-bearer to the king." Here was a position of comfort and luxury if he had cared only for that, but he was a man who thought of other things, and he could not be content while his less fortunate brethren were struggling with great difficulties. Some who reach positions of wealth and influence feel justified in forgetting those of their own flesh and blood who are burdened with poverty and trouble. Nehemiah had often in his silent hours thought of those who had escaped from Babylon, and gone in the "Second Exodus," to build up Jerusalem. There was no daily newspaper or quick telegraphic despatch to bring him the news, and so he must wait till someone should come from the scene of action. When such people came, Nehemiah did not wait until they poured out their sorrowful tale and then treat them as intruders upon his pleasant court life. He was anxious to hear about Jerusalem and the condition of the people there. Alas! the news was very sad, the beautiful prophecies had not been quickly and literally fulfilled. Jerusalem was not arrayed in festal garments, serving her God with peace and gladness. No; this is the report: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down and the gates thereof are burned with fire." In a few words we have a terrible picture of misery and desolation. If Nehemiah had been simply a selfish courtier he would quickly have drowned his grief in the wine that he served to the King; but as a man of deep piety he allowed it to sink into his heart. He fasted and wept before God for several days; it was not a mere rush of feeling, but a settled, deliberate brooding over his country's sorrows. Out of such stern, devout meditation a real abiding purpose was sure to grow. The fault with us often is that we hasten quickly to resolutions which have no root and no strength. This order is best: first, silent pondering over life's hard problem; then earnest prayer, to be followed by consistent action. Out of Nehemiah's faithful self-examination in the presence of God there comes a prayer which is full of power, because it is so true and terribly in earnest. A man's best theology is expressed in his living prayers. Then not by way of sermon, but confession, his noblest thoughts of God, and his most vital beliefs

\*International Sunday-school lesson for Nov. 5th; Neh. i. 1-11. Read chap. ii. Golden Text: "Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant, this day."—Neh. i. 11.

are put into words. Men may differ widely as to their theology and yet express in their prayers substantially the same great truths.

Note, then, the spirit of reverence. There is no flippant familiarity with God; but rather a sense of the Divine mightiness, with lowly remembrance of the Divine mercy. What finer invocation could we have than this: "O Lord God of Heaven, the great and terrible that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His Commandments." God is not to be won by fine phrases; but this style of address, at once simple and sublime, shows the true spirit of piety. Then the prayer opens with the cry for attention in our sorrow; God seems so far off and so inattentive. This is not so; but it is well that we should plead for a hearing, and express with pathetic earnestness the sense of our need and of the importance of our cause. But immediately follows the confession of sin, which is one of the most important elements of prayer. As the patriot broods over the sorrows of his people he is prepared to admit that they have brought much sorrow upon themselves, by their forgetfulness of God and their perversity of life. Noble confession: "I and my father's house have sinned." It is not wise to talk glibly of God's judgments on others; but we do well to recognize God's judgments upon ourselves, and to admit that our failures and pains may be needed as a chastisement. Thus Nehemiah confesses that his nation has fallen under the condemnation prophesied of old. Their God was not a mere idol or tribal god, but was a God of righteousness. He would not keep the people in their land because they fed him with daily sacrifices; because they sinned he would scatter them, that they might learn righteousness and cast off idolatry. In their sorrow the Divine justice was manifested; that justice without which love is mere sentimental gush. But see how beautifully this is brought in; it is two-sided. If God would banish the wicked he would also bring back the penitent; and the patriot having acknowledged the side of justice would lay hold of the side of mercy, and make his plea for the building up of a new nation and the manifestation of fresh grace and peace.

This may all seem very general, but in the conclusion it converges on to Nehemiah's own life, and the plan he has before him. He is about to ask a favor of the earthly king, but he will ask it of God first; for he knows that the hearts of kings are in the hand of the God of Heaven. The prayer, then, is not a piece of general declamation for the purpose of relieving his soul; it is a preparation for personal service. This is what all prayer ought to be. When we think of Nehemiah's successful expedition, of his practical statesmanship, of his hostility to shallow compromise, and his fervent zeal for the temple worship, let us not forget the great hour of worship and the season of true prayer by which it was preceded and inspired.

The heart of a Christian should be a well of living water, a fount of holy and blessed influences, whose streams flow in all directions, carrying comfort, cheer, encouragement, help and gladness to every other life they reach. Much orthodoxy of belief does not make one a Christian, nor does attention to ecclesiastical rites and rules; a Christian is one in whom the life of Christ pulses and the love of Christ glows and burns.

## The Ministry of Joy.

By Rev. George Matheson, D.D.

There shall be no night there.—Rev. 21: 25.

There shall be a serving of the sorrowful? You tell me that heaven is a land of ministrations. How can it be so if my heart is to have the joy of morning? Can joy minister to grief? Yes, joy alone can. It is not night that ministers to night; it is nightlessness. To meet the clouds of others, I should myself be clear. If I have lost a child, and my neighbor across the street has lost a child, the common experience does not itself make either of us helpful to the other. To be helpful to my neighbor, it is not enough that I have passed into the same valley; I must have passed through; "Yea, though I walk through the valley," is a saying of deep significance. It is not the darkness that makes me a comforter; it is seeing the evil at the foot of the lane. It is being able to say, "I have passed through; you will also."

O Thou who art training me to be a ministering spirit, let me enter into Thy joy. Ere I go with Thee to the wilderness, let me stand with Thee by the glad streams of Jordan; let me see the opened heavens and the descending dove. It was by the joy set before Thee that Thou didst bear my cross; how else shall I bear Thine? Thou hast said that Thy yoke of ministration is easy and its burden light; but to whom? To those who have found rest to their souls. Thou hast bidden me learn of Thee, and that is Thy experience. It was the gleam of Olivet that made possible Thy Calvary. In vain shall I seek my brother's night if there is night in my own soul. In vain shall I stand by when he drinks the cup of sorrow, in vain shall I participate in his cup of sorrow if I have not seen the sparkle in the bitter draught. Show me that sparkle, O Lord. Reveal to me the sunlight in the cup. I would not go forth to help the sad on the mere ground that I have myself been sad. I would see Thy crown in my own waters before I say to my brother, "Peace, be still." Reveal to me Thy gold ere I go. Let me stand with Thee one hour on the mountain ere I descend to meet the valley. Let me catch the morning rays ere I confront the evening shadows. My heart will be a minister to the night when there is no night there.

## The Master's Touch.

In the still air the music lies hidden;  
In the rough marble beauty hides unseen;  
To make the music and the beauty, needs  
The Master's touch, the sculptor's chisel keen.

Great master, touch us with Thy skillful hand;

Let not the music that is in us die!  
Great Sculptor, hew and polish us; nor let,  
Hidden and lost, Thy form within us lie!

Spare not the stroke! do with us as thou wilt!

Let there be naught unfinished, broken, marred:

Complete Thy purpose that we may become  
Thy perfect image, Thou our God and Lord.

He who loves Christ loves his brother also. To begin to be a Christian is to remove from the arctic zone of cold selfishness into the warm summer zone of love. We cannot make too much of our relation to Christ—that is the beginning of it all—but we have relations to others as well. We are to live in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, with love that suffereth long and is kind, that envieth not, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, beareth all things, endureth all things. The Christian life that does not make us more gentle, more patient, more unselfish, more helpful, is not realizing its true meaning.