

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.

By Rev. J. W. McClellan, D.D.

Certain men came down (Rev. Ver.), v. 1. The story of Pitcairn Island is one of wonderful interest. It was peopled by the mutineers of H.M.S. Bounty, who intermarried a few natives whom they found there. After a few years of vice and bloodshed, one of the sailors began to study the Bible. He was so impressed with it, that he succeeded in persuading the whole community to order their lives according to its teaching. When a ship from civilization at last reached them, it found a society that could not be matched on earth for simple piety and moral cleanliness. It was like a Garden of Eden come again. It was not long before missionaries arrived from the United States to teach these Christians,—what do you suppose? That their religion was all wrong, because they did not keep the Sabbath on Saturday. These are the "proselytizers" whom Jesus condemned. They are more anxious to make converts to some fad or ceremony, than to truth and righteousness.

Except . . . after the manner of Moses, v. 1. Dr. John Brown, the famous author of *Rab and His Friends*, thus describes a picture of Luther in the convent library at Erfurt. "It is Luther, the young monk of four and twenty, in the library of the Convent at Erfurt. . . . He is gazing into the open page of a huge Vulgate—we see it is the early chapters of the Romans. A bit of broken chain indicates that the Bible was once chained—to be read, but not possessed—it is now free, and his own. . . . Next moment he will come upon—or it on him—the light from heaven, shining out from the words, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God," and in imitation of this, His dawn, the sweet pearly light of morning, shining in at the now open lattice, is reflected from the page upon his keen anxious face." Before that radiant text, the contention that Judaic forms and ceremonies are essential to salvation vanishes like the darkness of the night before the rising sun.

Great joy, v. 3. You can tell what sort of a person any one is, by observing what makes him laugh. There are some who never laugh so heartily as when something is told them in a whisper, something which is not fit for any one to hear, and which they would be ashamed to tell in public. There are others who enjoy nothing so much as to see some unfortunate person in trouble. They will tell you that they "nearly died laughing," when Jim fell down in the mud or Susy's hat blew over the fence and a dog ran off with it. Others get their greatest pleasure out of their vanity. If they overhear a word of admiration, they are in bliss, and to be in a position to command service and praise, is the height of their ambition. But the joy of these Christians was of a different sort. It was because they had heard the good news of many unlikely persons having become Christians. It is the deepest and best kind of joy, to rejoice in people's being made better.

Brethren . . . Gentiles, v. 23. These are the same people that these Jewish Christians used to call dogs. The Prince Consort, the beloved husband of Queen Victoria, whose birthday we celebrate to-morrow, once taught his chil-

dren a lesson in sympathy. It happened that an old man whom he had made friends with somewhere, was at the table with them, dining, and began to eat with his knife. The young princes and princesses began to look at each other and titter. Their father reproved them with a look, and immediately began to eat with his own knife. After the guest had gone he said to them, "It is well to observe etiquette, but it is better to avoid insulting people. My old friend was worth the inconvenience I went to." How much happier would the world be if that spirit prevailed!

To the Holy Ghost, v. 28. Suppose we saw an army sitting down before a granite fortress, and they told us they intended to batter it down. We might ask them how. They point us to a cannon ball. Well, but there is no power in that. It is heavy, but not more than a couple of hundred pounds. If all the men in the army were to throw it, it would make no impression. They say, "No, but look at the cannon." Well, but there is no power in that; it is a machine and nothing more. "But look at the powder." Well, there is no power in that, either; a child may spill it, a sparrow may pick it up. Yet this powerless powder and this powerless ball are put into the powerless cannon; one spark of fire enters it, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the power is a flash of lightning, and the ball is a thunderbolt, which smites the wall with destruction. So it is with our churches and Sunday schools, our resolutions and our purposes. We need the baptism of fire, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There comes a spring for every snow,
For every death a life hereafter;
And they whose tears have bitterest
flow,
Shall fill their lips with sweetest
laughter.

—Rose Terry Cook.

PRAYER.

There can be no darkness when Thou art nigh, for Thy name is Light. When our spirits know the calmity of gloom and the madness of despair, it is because they have not faith in Thee. O Lord God may all the sons of men know that where Thou art there is joy without ceasing; that heaven indeed is where Thou art; that a lowly heart filled with Thee can never know wretchedness. And we ask that this truth be spread by help of Thy blessing.

LOSING TIME BY SAVING IT.

It is easier to be on time than to be late. It seems easier to be late, and so we fall into the same old trap here that the Devil uses everywhere,—that of substituting seeming for fact. Many a man or a woman goes on through life without ever discovering that chronic tardiness means chronic—and unnecessary—trouble, when chronic promptness would be easier, and avert all the trouble. We think we are going to save ourselves a few minutes for something else by putting off the doing of a promised piece of work until the last, break-neck moment; but we find that this last-minute method costs us more than the few minutes we thought to gain. It does cost an effort of the will to take up work, or to start to keep an appointment, or to get out of bed in the morning, in ample time to insure no tardiness. But that is all it costs: will-power; and that cost is always gain. Whereas the costliness of being behind time is a dead loss.

LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

Circumcision—Was practised by the Egyptians, Ethiopians, Abyssinians, Kadre, and some of the natives of Australia and of this continent, at the entrance to manhood and initiation into the full rights of citizenship. It was at first most likely a recognition of the divine ownership of human life, a part of the body being sacrificed to preserve the remainder. While in other nations it continued as a hygienic custom, or a tribal mark, among the Hebrews it was spiritualized into a symbol of devotion to a high religious ideal. Modern Jews perform it in the child's home, on the eighth day, by an appointed official. The child is first placed on Elijah's chair, a vacant seat dedicated to the prophet because of his jealousy for the covenant, and certain texts are recited. The operator then sets the child on the godfather's knees, repeating a benediction. After the operation, the father recites another benediction, to which all present give a response, wishing a wise and good life to the child. Then follows a prayer by the operator, in which the child is named and blessing invoked upon him, to which also a response is made by those present. The ceremony is followed by a feast.

WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE?

Eternal life is a present possession. This is eternal life, the knowledge of God and humanity as revealed in Christ. John does not represent the deeper teaching of his Master when he translates the meaning of life and death, so far as they concern mankind, out of the physical into the spiritual. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." According to the profound and beautiful old man who wrote these words, mere existence is not life, nor is the mere extinction of the body, its reduction to the elements of earth and air, death. Life is existence, plus supreme quality; and death is existence, minus this quality.

Here is John, true to Christ, when all others forsook him and fled, following him into the court of the high priest, watching him with unutterable sympathy, accompanying him through his mockery and shame with inexpressible love, going with him to the place of crucifixion, and receiving, as he stood there, from the supreme Sufferer, the last message of care for the beautiful mother, and from that hour adding the august responsibility to the privileges of his discipleship. That is life—existence raised, enriched, and inspired by an unearthly and boundless love, and wrought over into heavenly excellence and joy.

Here, on the other hand, is Judas, covenanting with Christ's enemies that he may betray him; selling his Master, whom he knows to be innocent blood, for thirty pieces of silver; without sympathetic consciousness of all the truth that Jesus had spoken in his presence, of all the works of mercy he had done, and of all the particular love that he had shown him, going to the garden of agony and betraying his Lord with a kiss! That is death—existence without love, destitute of worth, dogged by despair and pursued by the shadow of an infinite horror. The man of love is the representative of life; the man of treason is the type of death.—George A. Gordon, D.D.

Truth being essential to holiness, it is the duty of Christians to bring it to bear upon all those who are ignorant, and all the works of darkness.

* S.S. Lesson, May 23, 1908.—Acts 15: 1-5, 22-29. Commit to memory vs. 23, 29. Study Acts 15: 1-36. Golden Text—We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved, even as they.—Acts 15: 11.