

The Quiet Hour.

Obadiah and Elijah.

S. S. LESSON, 1 Kings 18: 1-6, August 14, 1904.

GOLDEN TEXT—*I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.* 1 Kings 18: 12.

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And it came to pass after many days, v. 1. Of all kinds of service that God's children may render, there is perhaps no one form harder than waiting, just waiting His will. And it is a service which is required not infrequently. Many a poor invalid lies year after year, longing to go out to active service; and yet God's providence says "Wait!" It is hard to realize, but none the less gloriously true, that "they also serve, who only stand and wait."

And Ahab called Obadiah, v. 3. Even a king needs a counsellor. No one is so sufficient to himself that there do not arise crises when he is led to see that he needs some one to advise with. Happy it is for us when we know of a wise and faithful friend upon whom we may call for advice, and who, we know, will advise free from any selfish motive.

Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, v. 3. The fear of the Lord had taken a deep hold upon his life. He seems to have been of a quiet, peaceable disposition, one who naturally shunned danger; and yet he was so ruled by his fear of God that, when it was a question between his own safety and duty, he did not hesitate, but cared for the prophets of God at the risk of his own life. As the old saying puts it, "Fear God, ye saints, and then ye will have nothing else to fear." If one is like Obadiah, his fear of God will make him strong to do the right thing at any cost, and when the test comes, he will not fail.

Peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, v. 5. How strangely mingled are the fates, not only of human beings, but even the lower animals are called upon to suffer for man's folly and wickedness. It is well to recognise the fact, however impossible we find it to explain, and at least it should deepen our sense of moral responsibility. Ahab wished to save the cattle, and yet their suffering was the result of his own ill-doing. When we see how far spreads the result of sin, we should hate it with perfect hatred, and shun it whenever we are tempted by it.

And he knew him, and fell on his face, v. 7. Obadiah is overcome when he meets the prophet. One reason, doubtless, is the unexpectedness of it. The last man he had thought to meet that day was Elijah. And there is this possibility of the unexpected all about us. If it is borne in mind, it certainly should save us from ennui. We know not, any moment, but some great crisis may be thrust upon us. The other thought that overcame Obadiah was doubtless the strong character of the prophet. Obadiah served Jehovah himself, but did it quietly. He would never dare to beard the king as Elijah had done, and so the milder, weaker nature does deference to the stronger. And yet each in his place was useful. If God has meant us for Obadias, we need not distress ourselves because we cannot be Elijahs.

When I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me, v. 12. We are tempted to despise this man whose first thought was for his own safety, and yet he is the same man who risked his life to save

the Lord's prophets. Let this teach us to remember the unwisdom of judging hardly those who are guilty of some sudden weakness. There may be in the one whose act has proved him a weakling, possibilities of heroic deeds. Men are not always the same. The hero does not always act like a hero, and the coward is sometimes brave.

I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth, v. 12. This was something to be grateful for, and something worth remembering. He may have faltered, but his life through he had sought to serve God. I don't know that a man can say anything better for himself than that, and if he can say it truthfully, then whatever weakness there may be in him, yet God will deliver. Start life in the fear of God and its goal will be glorious.

Bell's Story.

Another Covenant Chapter.

The prophet Elijah looked over his own land—the land of the ten tribes—and he saw that his people had "forsaken the covenant of their God, thrown down His altars, and slain His prophets with the sword." The great purpose was born into his soul, to turn the heart of the nation back again to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Elijah was like his great progenitor Jacob, he was of a practical turn of mind. If a thing is to be done, there must be some means devised for the doing of it. This problem was before him—"How shall I reach the heart of this nation, so that it shall hear my message and heed it?" It was a big problem as big a problem then as it would be to-day, but Elijah knew he had a great God behind him in his enterprise, and he was not timid in the arranging of a plan. He would make the weather a preacher, and that should speak for the living God and for him as His prophet so that Israel would be glad to hear the message he had to deliver.

He appeared before Ahab, and announced what he was going to do and then disappeared. For three years and six months there was neither dew nor rain in Israel, and the land longed to see and hear Elijah with a mighty longing. When the word was sent round, "Behold Elijah is here," all Israel gathered at Mount Carmel, ready to watch every movement and listen to every word as for their life.

Then in the presence of the nation, and of the defeated prophets of Baal, Elijah prayed down fire upon the sacrifice; and next, in the quiet of the mountain top, the man who knew how to pray upon God's promise, prayed down an abundance of rain upon the thirsty land, and the message went home to the heart of every man, woman, and child in Israel—"The LORD, He is the God, the LORD, He is the God."

If we look out over the Christian world just now, may we not moan as Elijah did, "Thy people have forgotten thy covenant, they are turning their backs on thy house of prayer, and despising or denying thy message."

Are there any Elijahs now upon whose heart God can so lay these things that they shall indeed travail in birth for nations, not merely for individuals? The promises through a crucified Christ are for the nations. "So shall He sprinkle many nations." John Knox, with his face to the earth, wrestled for the nation—"O God, give me Scotland."

and the world wondered at the answer he received.

If the LORD our God has purposes of large mercy toward the world of this generation, so that "nations that knew not Him shall run unto Him," how shall He reach them with that message of mercy, so that a whole nation at once shall hear and heed it?

May it possibly be that He, failing response to gentler messengers, may be compelled as in Elijah's day, to take the weather as His preacher? may be compelled to withhold rain until the humbled nation has learned that the dews and rain are still good gifts of the living God who gives or withholdeth at His will. Then, if the rain is lacking long enough, they will, like Ahab, hunt the world for some Elijah, who will know God's covenant, and how to take hold of it so as to pray down first the fire to convince, and then the rain to bless and heal.

God has a purpose of special and effectual mercy, not only to nations, but also to the whole world. This petition from our Lord's own lips—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"—is yet coming down in a glorious answer. "The earth shall be covered with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." "The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this."

But how shall it be done?

For some time it has been deep in the heart of the writer that in some way He will need to set His Bible up, first before His own people, and then before the whole world, as actually His own word, every jot of which His honor stands pledged to fulfil. God "has magnified His word above all His name." Until His people have again learned to do the same, they are powerless to win the world, they are powerless to act as God's arm. How can God teach His people so that they shall really understand, that the whole Bible is the word of God?

Ever since the drought of 1903, it has seemed such a feasible way for Him to do this, to withhold rain until the nations are humbled in the dust, to teach His Elijahs their covenant hold upon the rainbow covenant, and then to give them faith and courage to lead the humbled nations to the throne of grace. Then a modern repetition of the double scene on Mount Carmel will fulfil Christ's own word, "Elias verily shall come, and restore all things." The first thing that needs to be restored among God's own people is full faith in the plenary inspiration of the whole Bible, even of the book of Genesis.

Elijah in Israel found bitter failure even in the midst of overwhelming success, because the thing he had set his heart upon could not be until after the "decease that was to be accomplished at Jerusalem." Though it may have been whispered in his ear as it was to Simon, "Thou shalt not see death until thou hast seen all that thou hast asked for." But the Elijah that is to prepare for the way for His millennial victory shall achieve complete success, for the lips that never overstate anything have said, "Elias truly shall first come and restore all things."

Shall it have to be through the terrible famine preacher that the coming Elijah shall speak?

"When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world *will* learn righteousness." "Let favor be shown to the wicked yet will he *not* learn righteousness." God has long tried the "favor" giving "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our heart with food and gladness." It may be that now, even in great mercy, He will effectually try the other way, sending judgments that shall "shake terribly the earth," and prepare the inhabitants of the world to receive their