

with sorrow when they remembered in how many ways they had broken it.

## II. Rejoicing, 10-12.

Vs. 10-12. *He*; probably Ezra, whose place it was to give religious directions. *Eat the fat, and drink the sweet.* The meaning is, "Go and enjoy yourselves, eat and drink of the best—let there be no fasting on such a day as this." *Send portions,* etc. The rejoicing was not to be selfish, it was to stimulate practical kindness. Gifts were to be sent to the poor, as at our Christmas Day. Among the Arabians, whatever remained from an offering was divided among the poor. *This day is holy* (see v. 9 and v. 11). "A day sacred to the Lord is a day in which His presence is specially felt." In the nearness of a loving and forgiving God there is true and satisfying joy. *For the joy of the Lord*; Israel's joy, springing from confidence in her protecting Lord. In this glad assurance they had, and we may have, a strong fortress from which to repel every foe. *Great mirth, because they had understood.* They saw now in God's words, not merely terrifying threats and curses, but His great love towards them, expressed in precious promises and cheering assurances.

## III. Feasting, 13-18.

Vs. 13, 14. *On the second day*; "of the seventh month" (v. 2), the month Tisri, our October. *Heads of fathers' houses* (Rev. Ver.); that is, the leading men of the nation, rulers in civil affairs. *The priests, and the Levites,* etc. It was a hopeful sign for the nation's future, when its leaders sought a fuller knowledge of the divine law. *They found written in the law.* Reading such passages as Lev. 23:39-43 and Deut. 16:13, 15 (compare Ex. 23:16; Num. 29:12-38), they learned that one of the great feasts which the Lord had commanded by Moses, had fallen into neglect. This was the Feast of Tabernacles (see v. 9). While the Jews were in Babylon, so far from the temple, it had been impossible for them to observe all that the law required. Thus the national feasts came to these earnest students as a new discovery. *Dwell in booths*; temporary huts of branches, intended to remind the Jews of how their ancestors had

lived in tents in the wilderness. In these the people dwelt during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Vs. 15, 16. *Go forth unto the mount*; the mount of Olives and the hill country of Judah in general, where boughs were plentiful. *Olive branches,* etc. All these were trees of thick foliage, and hence well suited for the construction of temporary booths. *Booths . . . upon the roof.* The roofs were flat. For the use made of them see Josh. 2:6; 1 Sam. 9:25 (compare Deut. 22:8). *In their courts.* Eastern houses were generally built in the form of a quadrangle, enclosing a courtyard. The booths on the roofs and in the courtyards of their houses would be occupied by the citizens of Jerusalem. Those coming into the city from the country for the feast would find accommodation in the booths built in the courts of the temple and the streets ("broad places," public squares) of the water gate and the gate of Ephraim.

Vs. 17, 18. *Since the days of Joshua* (Joshua). The writer cannot mean that the feast had never been observed since the days of Joshua, but only that there had been no such joyous and general celebration of the festival. *Also day by day . . . he read,* etc. Ezra seems to be meant. In the midst of their rejoicing the people were reminded that all their blessings came from God's hand. *The eighth day . . . a solemn assembly*; marking the close of the Feast. Then, after one day's interval for clearing away the booths, the people were assembled again, ch. 9:1. At this gathering they promised to keep the law of Moses, to pay their tithes for the support of the temple service, and to keep the Sabbath holy (see ch. 9:38 and ch. 10).

## Light from the East

TIRSHATHA—Is a Persian word signifying literally "His Reverence" or "His Excellency." It is not merely equivalent to governor, which is elsewhere applied to Nehemiah. That was the proper title of the prefect, or viceroy, who had the civil and military oversight of a province under Persian rule. It is thought that Nehemiah saw that his civil power could never work the reformation which was needed, and that, on his visit to the Persian court, he obtained appointment as a special royal com-