

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLEABSALOM REBELS AGAINST
DAVID.*

By Rev. Clarence Mackinnon, D.D.

Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. v. 1. This ambitious young prince riding in his splendid chariot, with his company of outrunners, reminds us of Joseph, the young prime minister of Egypt, to whom the king assigned his second chariot. But what a contrast between the two! Joseph rode in the king's chariot, as the reward of faithful devotion to duty. Absalom assumed the appearance of royalty, with the treacherous purpose of turning it into reality, and that at the expense of his own father's downfall. Their methods and their motives made all the difference between these two young men. We show ourselves worthy of honor or of shame by the way in which we seek gain and advancement. Whatever goal we seek, let us be sure we reach it by a clean road.

See, thy matters are good and right, v. 3. No tropical plants excel in splendour the lianas of the South American forests. Woody, climbing and twining, they wrap themselves around the trunks of tall trees and swing from branch to branch in lusciant festoons. But for all their rich beauty, they are very treacherous to the trees which they adorn; for by and by they encircle the tree to the very top; then their own stems begin to thicken until they constrict and kill the tree which they have beautified. Flattery is as treacherous as the liana. "A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet", Prov. 29: 5. Many a one has been beguiled to his ruin by the glittering promises held out to him if he would only enter on some evil course. The flatterer, for his own purposes, lures his companions on in a path that can lead only to disaster, and at the end leaves them to bear by themselves the shame and loss he has brought upon them.

Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel, v. 6. The world has had many traitors. Balaam had the vision of a prophet, but the soul of a miser; and the money bags eventually won. Alcibiades loved Socrates, who was the wisest of the Greeks; but he loved his pleasures more, and betrayed the cause of his country, and sometimes he even wished his old teacher were dead, that there would be no one left to shame him. The greatest of all traitors is Judas who betrayed our Lord for less than twenty dollars. There is a picture at Brussels, of the false disciple as he comes by chance upon the workman who have been making the cross on which Christ is to be crucified. They are sleeping peacefully by the fire. Judas' face has an expression of awful remorse and agony as he sees the cross and tools. But he clutches his money bag still, and hurries on into the night. One who loves himself more than any man, however good, or any cause, however holy, is a traitor at heart.

Let me go and pay my vow, v. 7. Absalom told a lie. He really meant to raise a rebellion against the good king, his father. It was easy to tell the lie. But it was not so easy to wipe it out; for a falsehood is ineffaceable. A boy

was asked if he would tell a lie for a dollar. He said, "No." "For a thousand dollars?" "No." "Why?" "Because after the thousand dollars were spent, the lie would still remain." It is the most foolish of all bargains, surely, for the sake of a brief hour's advantage, to bring upon ourselves the shame and remorse that never fail to result from untruth and dishonesty.

If the Lord shall bring me again, I will serve the Lord, v. 8. In the gardens and parks in the south of England, the box tree is a familiar sight. Sometimes it grows to the height of twelve or fourteen feet. The most obvious and remarkable feature of this ornamental tree is the thickness of its growth, its multitude of crowded branches and leaves. So dense indeed does it become, that it can be clipped and pruned into the most fantastic figures. Yet, for all this luxuriance of leaf, the casual eye would not detect upon it a single flower. Flowers are there, but very small ones, on greenish tiny spikes in the axils of the leaves. How like the box tree is the hypocrite; all show and neither flower nor fruit.

CHEERFULNESS IN ADVERSITY.

Human nature is full of contradictions. Its elements are complex and more varied than the superficial imagine. The subtleties of the human heart are most perplexing. On the surface it would seem that cheerfulness depends on happy circumstances, good health, or great prosperity. Yet this is not an absolute rule, for cheerfulness is often found where these things are lacking.

I used to visit a woman engaged in a "sweated industry." She lived in a small, ill-lighted, unsanitary room in a slum. She worked through the weary days, and knew nothing of holidays. Her wage was small, her occupation precarious, and her health indifferent; yet she would work away, singing hymns, her favorite hymn being:

"I feel like singing all the time,
My tears are wiped away,
For Jesus is a Friend of mine,
I'll praise Him all the day."

This "sweated" was one of the happiest beings I have ever known. What was her secret? What prompted her happiness? It was religion—the religion of Christ. And the religion of Christ is the supreme factor in inspiring cheerfulness in adversity.

Herein is the chief glory of Christianity: its message of good cheer. When Jesus came to humanity, the world was shrouded in dull care. Cheerfulness was associated with sensual pleasure. God was a mystery, the future life black with uncertainty. Jesus came—the Light of the world—and at his coming the angel declared to the shepherds: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."

He was not, as art has so often represented him, steeped in austere gloom, with a face of pathetic sorrow; rather was he radiant with peace and joy. He saw the love of his Father in all nature, in the lilies of the field, and in the birds of the air. He was supremely cheerful in adversity. Even when over him there fell the shadow of the cross, and he knew he must tread the sorrowful way, he said to his disciples: "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

And as a legacy to his church—to those who had to face persecution and stress for him—he bequeathed his peace. "Let not your heart be troubled." "My peace I give unto you."—Rev. G. Ensor Walters in *The Cheerful Life*.

There is always a place to reap for the man who has his sickle ready.

LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

By Rev. James Rose, D.D.

Absalom—Was David's third son, and his mother was Maachah, the daughter of the king of Geshur, a small tribe on the east of the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps it was from his mother that he inherited the treacherous spirit of intrigue by which the courts of the East were and are still characterized. No one, not even the members of the ruler's own family, can be trusted absolutely. Hence despots often surrounded themselves with foreign troops, and raised brilliant slaves to the highest positions, in order to secure fidelity. This system of intrigue also led to a network of spies and informers, like private detectives, who dogged every official's footsteps and pried into his home life. It was the knowledge that no near heir to the throne could be safely left alive, that led to wholesale massacres of uncles, brothers, cousins, old and young, to make certain that no plots should rise around any of them.

"Let Me Go"—When any official in the Turkish courts fears himself suspected of a plot, he often escapes by asking the Sultan for permission to make a pilgrimage to Mecca—a permission which according to Mohammedan law cannot be refused, as the obligation of the pilgrimage takes precedence of all other duties.

"I HAVE FIVE BRETHREN."

By Rev. John Neil Robertson.

This was one of the many sad facts remembered in hell by Dives. His regret and sorrow may be that of any Christian who is self-centered to any extent.

You have many brethren—millions of them—but the nearer they are to you in location, the closer in physical relation, or the more susceptible to your influence, owing to more or less frequent contiguity in business, social or religious life, the greater is the need for you to concentrate your attention on the possibilities of your bringing them to a knowledge of the truth.

"They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham; "they have churches and bibles and ministers," say many to-day; but they also have you, and your interest may be the essential factor now lacking in the process of winning these brethren for Christ.

How to do it? Have a prayer list. Surely you can at least pray for your brethren, seeing you are enjoined even to pray for your enemies. Dives prayed, but too late. Praying for those on your list, your desires for their salvation will be developed and will resolve themselves into action. You will have a willingness to co-operate with God and an increasingly strengthened determination to use present ability and opportunity. Hindrances will vanish, courage will increase, faith will conquer, and possible future regrets over lost brethren will be avoided by united fellowship with those whose presence with us in glory will be as bright stars in our crowns.

"I have five brethren"—or five children—or five Sunday school scholars—or a father or mother or child or brother or some other relation—and they are unevangelized. Well, will you think of them now or wait until eternity begins for you?

Dives in life was busy thinking of his estate and wealth and pleasures. What occupations or recreations are preventing you from doing something for Jesus?

This is the day when we all make our annual pilgrimage to Bethlehem.

*S. S. Lesson November 1, 1908, 2 Samuel 15: 1-12. Commit to memory vs. 5, 6. Study 2 Samuel, ch. 15. Read 2 Samuel, ch. 13 to 16.—Golden Text.—Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.—Exodus 20: 12.