

their project of rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem. But in spite of their taunts the work was pressed steadily on, so that the wall all round the city had now reached half its height, v. 6. *Were . . . wroth*; filled with fury at the brave builders, whom they could no longer despise.

Vs. 8, 9. *Conspired*. They planned to surprise the city by an unlooked-for attack, seize Nehemiah (ch. 6 : 2), capture and slay the workmen, and so stop the work. *But* (Rev. Ver.) . . . *prayer . . . and . . . watch*. Over against the secret plotting of the treacherous foes are set these two means of defence. A third, namely, careful preparations for meeting the attack, is described in vs. 13, 14. Prayer "was the first and in Nehemiah's mind the most essential defensive measure. We find him resorting to it in every important juncture of his life. It is his sheet-anchor."

Vs. 10-12. *Judah said*, etc.; that is, representatives of the Jewish community. Judah (Judæa) was now a province of the Persian empire. *Strength . . . decayed*. The removal of men to keep "watch" (v. 9) had so weakened the number of workers, that the people lost heart and were ready to give it all up; the work was so large, and there were so few to do it. *Much rubbish*; which had to be removed before the wall could be built. *We are not able*. Thus Nehemiah had to meet, not only opposition from without, but what was far more to be dreaded, disaffection and despondency within. *Our adversaries said*, etc. Nehemiah gives, as if in their own words, his enemies' secret project of a surprise attack upon Jerusalem. Like the wise and resourceful general he was, he had kept himself informed as to the plans and movements of his foe. He was not to be caught napping. *Jews* (in outlying towns) *which dwell by them* (the enemies) . . . *said*. Added to the discouragement of his own followers within, and the schemes of the foes without the city, Nehemiah was now met by a panic among the Jews living in other parts of the country. *Must return* (Rev. Ver.). The people in the frontier towns, fearing an attack from the surrounding enemies, demanded that their friends and relatives at work in Jerusalem should come home to protect them.

## II. The Leader, 13, 14.

Vs. 13, 14. *Therefore set I in the lower places*, etc.; where the wall had reached the least height. Armed detachments were stationed at these points, as those most exposed to attack, and those from which the approaching enemies could best be seen. *After their families*. Nehemiah showed wisdom in his arrangement, for clan feeling is strong in Eastern races. *And I . . . said . . . Be not ye afraid*. The heroic leader rouses his followers to deeds of bravery, by reminding them that God is on their side, and that they are fighting for their loved ones. And he himself sets them a noble example of courage.

## III. The Workers, 15-20.

Vs. 15, 16. *When our enemies heard*, etc. "When the enemy approached, and saw from a distance the whole people awaiting them in perfect equipment, order and spirit," they lost heart and "turned back." (Ewald.) *God . . . brought their counsel to nought*. Nehemiah had taken all precautions, yet he attributes the success of his efforts to God. *Half of my servants*; that is, his body-guard, who were trained men: of these, one-half worked on the walls, while the other half stood at different points holding the weapons in readiness against an attack. *Spears . . . shields . . . bows . . . habergeons*. See Light from the East. *The rulers were behind*, etc. The chiefs of the people stood behind the workers on the walls, directing and encouraging them, and ready to lead on the armed force, if an attack was made on the workmen.

Vs. 17, 18. *They that builded* (Rev. Ver.) . . . *they that bare burdens*. There were two classes of workmen: (1) the actual builders of the wall, skilled workmen; (2) the laborers, who "laded themselves" (Rev. Ver.), removing the rubbish and supplying new material. The laborers, who could steady their load with one hand, held a weapon in the other; the builders, requiring both hands for the laying of the wall, kept their swords girded by their sides, ready for use at a moment's warning. *He that sounded the trumpet was by me*; so that, in case of attack at any point, alarm might be given and help summoned from all parts of the wall.