

The Quiet Hour.

Omri and Ahab.

S. S. LESSON.—1 Kings 16: 23-33. July 31, 1904.

GOLDEN TEXT—Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.—Prov. 14: 34.

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Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, v. 25. The life of a man is made up of a great many words and acts. But there is a certain tone and temper to the life that is characteristic of the whole. It is an improbable supposition that everything that Omri did as king of Israel was bad. That would be to make him a moral monster. But the effect of his life was evil in its sum total in the sight of the Lord. It is quite likely that the testimony which might be borne of him by many of his subjects would not be of this sort. He must have been a man of considerable strength of character or he could not have gained or retained the kingdom. But whatever bravery he might be credited with, there was a judgment being passed upon him by God, and that was that his life was evil. And a final judgment must be passed on every one's life. Let us be careful lest this thing that was said of Omri may be said of us.

Did worse than all that were before him, v. 25. There are depths in wickedness even as there are heights of righteousness. There may be an evil pre-eminence, and Omri attained to it. What an awful verdict it is to pass on any man's life when it can be said of him that he did wickedly above all that were before him.

Ahab his son reigned in his stead, v. 28. Even as our lives were influenced by those who are older than we or by men and women who died ere we came into the world, so will our lives have effect upon a generation which will succeed us. Omri died and Ahab succeeded him. If the father was bad, the son was to be worse; but the father was in large measure responsible for the conduct of the son. Not only parents, but all who are older should think often and earnestly on the effect that their lives and example are likely to have upon the younger people. We should strive to set such an example that the way of righteousness shall be made easy to them, and the way of evil-doing hard.

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil . . . above all that were before him, v. 30. Of the father it was said that he was worse than any who preceded him, and the son surpassed his father's record. Ahab, like Omri, was a man of great gifts and the story of his bravery as told us in 1 Kgs., ch. 20, is such that it cannot be read without a thrill of admiration for his splendid courage. And yet the very possibility for good that existed in him makes the record more sad. Sin in a weaker man than he would have been more excusable. The most pitiable wreck of all is the wreck of splendid genius or strength.

He took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, v. 31. There is nothing in life which more strongly affects us than the alliances which we form, whether it be such an alliance as that of marriage, the closest and most enduring of all the human relationships which are within our choice, or the friendships that we make. It is an old saying that has been verified again and again, that a man is judged by the company he keeps; and justly so, for those with whom we come

closely in contact are sure to have an influence upon our thinking and character. The young king never committed greater folly than when he married this Zidonian princess. Closely allied with the record of his marriage is the statement that he went and served Baal. How often young people enter into the marriage relationship without due thought of what is involved in that act.

And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, v. 33. The language of this statement is not happy. It is apt to carry with it the thought of God as One who may be irritated. Rather let us think that, as we do evil, we set ourselves against God's government of righteousness, and it will be as though we provoked Him, for He must ever set Himself in stern opposition to all unrighteousness. Through the example of the king true godliness was almost destroyed among the people of Israel. And God's attitude to them was that of Judge condemning, rather than of Father protecting, a very unwilling attitude on the part of the God of mercy.

Joy a Christian Duty.

BY JAMES E. C. SAWYER, D. D.

There is a deeply rooted idea in the minds of many people that Christianity is a religion of gloom. More than one great thinker has called it the religion of sorrow, and poets, who delight in things bright and beautiful, sink into minor tones when they sing of religion. True it is that in a certain sense Christianity may legitimately be called the religion of sorrow. Its founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Its symbol is a cross, significant of suffering and shame. The condition of its service is, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Its triumphant disciples are those who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Yet the joy of the Lord, underlying the sorrow of the Christian life and often bursting out with a radiance which changes the sky from dull gray to glowing brightness, ought never to be forgotten. We are so apt to emphasize the sorrow as to obscure the joy. The sorrow is only accidental and transient, while the joy is essential and permanent. Even sorrow itself becomes the handmaiden of joy when one learns the duty of being glad, for then we rejoice in the Lord always, knowing that in every experience perfect wisdom and love are present to make all things work together for good.

Both in the Old Testament and in the New, religion is described as joyous in its character. The Hebrew economy was jubilant in its arrangements for worship, calling into play the music of harp, viol, tabret, cymal, stringed instruments and organ. There was joy in the daily service of the Temple, and at the great feasts, when all the people kept holiday; and the land was filled with gladness from mountain top to valley. Thus the Hebrews recognized the duty of being glad and put it into practice.

The teaching of the New Testament is no less emphatic. The very message of Christianity is the Gospel, the good news of redeeming love. Christianity was introduced by a summons of joy: "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." On the night of His

betrayal, when the shadows of the approaching crucifixion fell thick and fast, Christ gathered His disciples around Him and told them of the blessed mystery of their union to Him, ending with the striking declaration, "These words have I spoken to you that My joy may be in you." The purpose of the Christian life, as revealed in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles, is to fill heart and life with the joy of Christ. When the believer realizes that truth he quickly apprehends the privilege and duty of being glad, and soon he walks in the sunshine of a joy which cannot be banished by the fog of human doubts of the clouds of earthly trials.

Cheerfulness is always an element of strength. The joy of the Lord is the strength of every true Christian. Joy is the law of the Kingdom of Heaven—in that kingdom light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. This joy is no transient feeling, born of the mood of the moment and clouded by the change of emotions, but a divinely-sustained principle based upon an abiding assurance. True, it is that this joy has its times of rapture and ecstasy when Heaven seems specially near and glimpses of the beatific vision are caught. Then the joy becomes unspeakable and full of glory. But these upliftings to the seventh heaven are rare and cannot be expected often, whereas the calm gladness of peace and communion ought to be the constant condition of the soul of every believer.

Gloomy Christians repel; sunny Christians attract. We are the world's Bible, and men judge the religion we profess by us who profess it. If we are dull and sad in our intercourse with our fellows, can we wonder at their blaming our religion? What we need to-day in our Christian life is a baptism of gladness that shall send us on our way with shining faces and jubilant praise. Rejoicing in the Lord we should recommend Christianity by the winsomeness of our words and deeds. In the worry and strain of our generation no more welcome strength could come to any life than the abiding gladness of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The surface of life may be troubled with a passing storm, but eternal peace will dwell in the heart. Our stream in the desert may be embittered by a Marah, but there will always be a sweetening tree at hand. We may be brought into our garden of Gethsemane, but there will always be an angel near to comfort and strengthen. Why, then, be sad? Should we not cast all gloom, born of doubt and fear, far from us, and live out full and happy lives in the sunshine of faith?—Christian Intelligencer.

A Prayer.

It is easy to live a day without thought of thee, thou ever-present Christ. It is easy and it should be impossible. For thou art always thinking of me. No pleasure brightens my life but is thy thought made manifest. I win no success that is not the accomplishment of some plan of thine for me. In the fulfilment of every task, it is thou that dost work and art satisfied. These many delights of earth and air, these many interests of the busy world that crowd upon me, are all—Thou, Thou! Yet I can forget thee; for a day or a week forget thee!

Let not this be my sin to-day, my Saviour, my friend. Let it not be my sin, my loneliness, and my loss. Cause me to see thee and hear thee in every sight and sound, and so shall I come to the day's end in great peace. For I do love Thee, Lord Jesus. Amen.—Gilbert Fairchild.