

God, of whom they had been testifying to the king, to care for them was on trial. Their own trust in that God needed to be drawn out and strengthened. It was not worth while that they should go back to their national home unless they went in the name and the strength of God. So Ezra had the people tarry and with fasting and prayer gather inner strength for the trying undertaking upon which they were about to embark. And the bravest people have always been those who, in the sense of their own impotence and inadequacy, have found strength of heart through insistent and desperate prayer. The men who have gone forth to their high providential adventures from nights of soul-wrestling with God have always been men dangerous to withstand. And back of every great advance movement in the world that has required the highest courage you are pretty certain to find a prayer meeting in which with conquering earnestness and faith the help of God was sought and found. Enterprises not projected by prayer do not usually carry very far.

MONEY AND THE CHURCH

Ezra took a large amount of gold and silver and other treasures with him back to Jerusalem. It is estimated to have been equal to nearly five million dollars. That would have been a pretty sum for "such as lay in wait by the way" if it had fallen into their hands. That it did not, in view of the lack of a military escort, can only be explained by the fact that God, who was "entreated" of Ezra and the people, protected them. There certainly would be anxiety in this country if a treasure so large as that was being carried through an uninhabited region by an unarmed company. It explains the carefulness with which Ezra divided the treasure among the twelve chiefs of the priests. The money had been given to Ezra chiefly by the king and his highest officers, though some was the free-will offering of the Jewish people. In addition to this large treasure which Ezra carried with him he bore letters of credit to the king's treasurers for large additional sums, and for wheat and wine and oil. And all of this was given to Ezra for religious purposes, for the service of "the house of the God of heaven"; that is, for the church. The church required it. The animals for sacrifice would have to be purchased and the labor needed must be paid for, and a thousand things would require money. The king and his counselors made no question about the necessity for money in the work which Ezra now to do. They did not say, as some practically now, "Because it is religious work we should not be called on for money." That, on the contrary, was the highest reason why they should give the money. If an enterprise is God's work, then ought we to be most eager to invest in it and help it on with our gifts. Money, with him who under-

stands its best uses, is condensed time, stored labor, compressed power. A man who has a dollar carries a day's labor in his pocket, which he can have expended, if he prefers, on the other side of the planet. Money is portable influence, and it makes possible an infinite transmutation of energy. A washerwoman's gift of five dollars to a college may be made to work forever through a great teacher's brain. A farmer may earn his money by hard labor and turn it into the service of the skilled physician and the trained nurse for the alleviation of suffering and the saving of life in a hospital. So far from complaining that the church asks for money, we should be thankful that in money God has given us the means of such varied and far-reaching power, and that the church provides for us some of the noblest opportunities for the use of our money.

AN OPTIMIST DISILLUSIONED

Ezra was very much of a dreamer and a seer of visions. That is to be put to his credit. Optimists have always led the world. The idealist, we say, lives in an unreal world, seeing things as they should be and not as they are. Yes, but some one must see things in that wise before things ever become as they should be. If everybody saw this world only as it actually is, it would be a very poor world and would never be a better one. But it must be confessed that the idealists and optimists frequently come in very painful contact with life as it is, and are often rudely awakened from their dreams. It was so with Ezra. He was full of enthusiasm as he went to Jerusalem. His life had been essentially that of the scholar. He had evidently thought very highly of the company of his people who had years before gone back to Jerusalem, and he expected to find a society embodying the ideals of the ancient law of Moses. But the ecstasy of the first great service of worship after he had reached Jerusalem had not died out, before his eyes were opened to a state of things which filled him with dismay and shame. Read verses one and two of chapter nine. The remainder of the chapter reveals the darkness and the depth of the disappointment in which he was involved. But Ezra's optimism was the optimism of faith, and so when his eyes were opened to the hard facts in the lives of the people, his disappointment did not drive him to despair but to prayer. The optimist who believes in God and thinks well of the world because of that belief, when, disillusioned by some sudden revelation of evil, he awakens to see that the world is not what he thought it was, still turns to God with tears and entreaties, and believes that through divine help his dream of the world can still be realized. And it is better to have dreamed and been disappointed than never to have dreamed at all.