

The Quiet Hour.

Saul of Tarsus Converted.

S. S. LESSON—April 6, 1902. Acts 9:1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* Acts 3:19.

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Breathing out threatenings and slaughter, v. 1. How many fierce enemies and appalling perils have threatened the life of the church! But the assaults of these enemies have ended in failure, and from these perils there has always been provided a deliverance. The Pharisees and Sadducees fought against Christ and His church. They have passed away, while Christ and the church remain. Under Nero and Trajan, the Roman empire hurled its mighty power against the Christian church, and multitudes of Christians met a martyr's death. But the Roman empire has fallen, while the church of Christ still stands firm. The Chinese empire may gather all its strength to crush the church, but, though it be the oldest empire on earth, it will perish before the influence of Christ begins to wane or His church shows signs of decay.

"Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane;

But the church of Jesus constant will remain."

The fight is on between the church and a score of evils like gambling, drunkenness and political corruption. Let the Christian never lose heart; these foes shall perish because they array themselves against the conquering Christ; the church shall be victorious and enduring, because she and her Lord are one.

He drew nigh unto Damascus, v. 3. God interposes at the opportune moment for the deliverance of His people. When destruction seems certain, His outstretched hand snatches them from the grasp of the destroyer. When Jerusalem was surrounded by the army of Sennacherib (2 Kings, chs. 18, 19), the Lord suddenly destroyed the besieging host. Herod (Acts, ch. 12) had fixed the time for the execution of Peter, and the fatal day was just at hand, when the angel was sent to rescue the apostle from the yawning jaws of death. In Browning's "Instans Tyrannus," the victim of oppression, at the moment when the tyrant's plans were completed

... sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts and prayed!
And then the oppressor "was afraid."

Who art thou, Lord? v. 5. The time came in the experience of Saul when he could say concerning Jesus: "I know him whom I have believed," 2 Tim. 1:12. The question of uncertainty marks the beginning of his Christian life; the declaration of assured conviction its maturity. The path from the one point to the other was the path of obedience. It is only by obeying Christ that we come to know Christ. Our religion is a life before it is a creed. It begins, not by our understanding a set of doctrines, but by yielding our wills to a Master. F. W. Robertson called 'obedience' the organ of religious knowledge. Jesus said (John 7:17, Rev. Ver.), "If any man willet to do His will, he shall know of the teaching."

I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, v. 5. Jesus stood between Saul and the persecuted Christians. He identified Himself with his oppressed followers. Every wicked man must face that fact—that in touching the

least of his little ones he touches Jesus. On the other hand the Christian has a great sense of security in the simple thought of Jesus; that He and His are one. He is touched when they are touched for harm; and where danger threatens, He goes out on the way to ward it off.

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, v. 5. Nothing but failure and disaster can result from fighting against Jesus. We only injure ourselves, when we resist the inward sense of compulsion to be Christians, that comes to us all in one way or another. Our rightful Master calls us into His service. To resist is to kick against the goad, and means for us harm, pain, sorrow. The one wise thing for us is to surrender to Jesus. Then defeat and shame will give place to a joyful battling for God, and an assured victory with its crown of righteousness. It is useless as well as wicked to oppose the progress of Christ's kingdom. Saul's persecution was a failure from the beginning. It resulted in sending Gospel messengers to proclaim the glad tidings in many lands. Sooner or later the persecutor will awake to find himself a disappointed, humiliated, defeated man. Are we on Christ's side or against Him? Are we striving only to meet with failures or to achieve a glorious success?

Approaching Calvary.

As we draw near to that season of the year which reminds us of our Lord's passion, resurrection and ascension, we read anew of his conscious approach to the cross; and the story constitutes a wonderful preface to the tragedy upon Calvary. During an outbreak of superstitious terror upon the part of Herod, who had, it was reported, threatened Jesus with death; and of hatred upon the part of the priestly rulers of the people, who found his popularity lessening their personal influence, our Lord had withdrawn himself to the northern parts of Palestine, desiring to be hid.

But this was impossible. Anxious and distressed parents sought him out and implored him for the relief of those dearer to them than life itself. The little hamlet in which he had hoped to find rest and obscurity was soon the shrine toward which feet from every quarter turned. And even when he ascended to the cool, serene heights of snow covered Hermon, celestial visitants dropped down from the over-arching skies to talk with him "of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

It was at the close of this ineffective attempt to secure privacy and recuperation that Jesus definitely set his face southward toward the city of the Great King; and on his return journey he attempted, from time to time, to prepare his disciples for the inevitable tragedy. But his most solemn assertions only roused their concentrated opposition. If this should be the case, why go back to Jerusalem at all? It must not be. What did he think of them? They would fight to the death before this deed could be so wrought.

Gently, but firmly, and once sternly, Jesus reproved the interferences that was so kindly meant. Perhaps in later days of silence they fancied it had passed from his mind; but at Capernaum he returned to the theme, and again at Jericho. And finally, as they

were making the last ascent from the valley of the Jordan, after a brief allusion to the fact that he was going to Jerusalem to be killed, he advanced so lost in thought and so changed in mien that instinctively the twelve fell behind and silently watched the movements of their Lord.

It was, we may imagine, just as he rose to the crest of the divide and came to the place from which the sight of the city bursts upon the view that the majestic figure of the Master was silhouetted, black against the golden sunset. For a moment he would pause and look upon the temple, the judgment hall—and Calvary!

Then there came over him that swift and indescribable change which Mark can only describe as something that filled them with amazement and fear. From a little distance they were looking upon Jesus; but he, the Mediatorial Sacrifice, was looking from afar upon the scene where in a few days his cross was to stand and the last act in the great tragedy of the atonement was to take place.

Those who saw his face and figure then, standing as we may believe against the evening sky, never forgot the impression made. It was such a moment as lifts the curtains of the soul and lets the world behold the very life pulse of the heart. We may form some mental image of Caesar's visage as he paused upon the brink of the Rubicon and cast the die which turned the history of the world from democracy back to absolutism. We may call up in our imagination the face of the Iron Duke when before the first gun was fired at Waterloo he made the decision which was to necessitate a new map of Europe. But how Jesus looked in that hour when he turned his eye toward the city and Calvary and his cross we can but dimly conceive. Suffice it to know his disciples whispered and trembled when they saw it, nor ever afterward attempted to deflect him from his set purpose of self sacrifice.

There comes to every soul an hour not without its hint of these tests, revelations and emotions. Every man comes sometime face to face with his own cross, and then the world knows whether he is a hero or a poltroon.

Old soldiers remember the moment when for the first time they looked upon the perilous edge of battle and had, in a breath, to decide for a man's part or a coward's disgrace.

And in the closing weeks of this winter's evangelistic campaign many a hearer is now face to face with the one most momentous issue of his life. There lies the way to the cross! Yonder stands the hill of Calvary! It costs to be a Christian. There are joys and delights in the service of the Master. One sits with him at the wedding table and with him is a fellow guest when Levi makes a great feast. There are hours in which one is admitted to divine communions not lawful to be uttered. There are scenes of transfiguration, and clouds of glory, into which the disciple may be permitted to enter. But at the end stands the cross! "Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" is the Master's searching inquiry. Here upon the heights whence self-denial, and shame, it may be, are within the view, will you turn back?

Many a time afterward the disciples must have been strengthened when they recalled the manner in which Jesus met the issue. What solemnity; what strength; what conscious victory! A thousand times must John have seen it in the sunsets above "the isle that is called Patmos." Whatever Gentiles may follow, he who has upon