

The Quiet Hour.

Jesus and Nicodemus.

S. S. LESSON John 3: 1-15. January 29, 1905.

GOLDEN TEXT.—For God so loved the world, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3: 16.

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Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, v. 1. Barriers there may be in the way of our coming to Jesus, built as our own pride and prejudice, the opinions of our companions, the dread of consequences, and a dozen other things. But these will vanish before an honest look at our own need and the Saviour's sufficiency, and a firm resolve to follow the guidance of our own judgment and conscience whithersoever they may lead us.

The same came to Jesus, v. 2. "Do it now" is good counsel with respect to daily duties. The wise man will follow it also in the concerns of the soul. The present opportunity is ours. But it flees fast away, and will never return—perhaps none so favorable will ever again come our way. Delay is a thief that will rob us of our highest happiness. No one has ever regretted promptness in seeking the Saviour. We cannot too quickly cast ourselves on Him.

Except a man be born again, v. 2. The sculptor carves a beautiful statue out of the shapeless marble, and the world wonders at his genius. But, however like the living human body, the statue has no power of motion. As little can we fulfil the duties of citizens in the Kingdom of God without receiving a new life from Him. Depend upon it, the Christian life begins, not with our doing something to earn God's favor, but with His imparting to us new power, to do His will. Life comes before service and spiritual life, like the life of the body, is a gift from Heaven.

How can a man be born when he is old, v. 4. It is hard for an old man to make a fresh start. He has all his past to fight against. The habits he has formed in his earlier years are now chains to hold him back. Hard? Yes, but not impossible, for the power of God can make all things new. But all said, the best time to enter on the new life is in youth. Then there is far less to hinder us. The way has not yet been made difficult for us. A young life yielded to the Holy Spirit's power—who can tell how beautiful and strong he will make it?

Born of water and of the Spirit, v. 5. Sometimes an old and useless building has to be removed, to make room for a new and finer edifice. In the spiritual life, also, there is a twofold process, destruction and construction. The evil must be taken away, that the character belonging to the new life may be built up in all its fair and stately proportions.

So is every one that is born of the Spirit, v. 8. It concerns us very little in what part of the wide ocean the wind took its rise. We are satisfied to fill our lungs with the ozone it brings, and receive new life and energy. There are many who have difficulty in telling precisely when and in what manner they received the new life. After all, this does not matter so much. The question of real moment is: Have we the new life now; do its fruits appear in character and conduct?

How can these things be? v. 9. Was it not a king of Siam who would not believe the statement of a traveller from

America, that in his country water became solid? The king had never seen ice, or heard of it before, and he could not understand how such a change was possible. We have no difficulty about it, because we have seen it so frequently. In like manner we are puzzled about the new spiritual life, until we receive it into our own soul, or see its effect in the conduct of others. Then our puzzle is solved.

Art thou the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things (Rev. Ver.) v. 10. Hugh Black, in his last book, *The Practice of Self-Culture*, says: "I once met an artisan in a country walk who knew every plant and insect, all the flora and fauna of that countryside; and all he had for his favorite pursuit was the half day a week which other workmen spent in loafing about the streets. As he pointed out to me interesting things which I had carelessly passed as weeds, I blushed for my ignorance and blindness." In the study of the Bible we should train ourselves to the same habits of keen observation and quick discernment which are so valuable in the study of nature. Then we shall learn many truths hidden from the careless reader.

Must the Son of Man be lifted up, v. 14. Jesus ever moved under the power of a double compulsion. It was the supreme aim of His life to do the Father's will. There was besides, in His heart a yearning love for lost men, and a deep longing to save them. Drawn by those two great forces, He moved surely and steadily to Calvary, there to pour out his life for us. Jesus must die to bring us back to God. Does not an answering "must" rest upon us? Surely we cannot resist the constraint of the Cross. Our hearts are hard indeed, if from them there issues no stream of love and trust in response to the love that flows from the wounds of the world's Saviour.

That whosoever believeth in Him have eternal life (Rev. Ver.) v. 15. Think for a little about the eternal life offered to us in Christ. Its course is in God. He quickens us from the death of sin. It is absolutely secure, for it is "hid with Christ in God." Its pattern is the life of God's own Son, for we are changed into His image "from glory to glory." And we are assured of its final perfection, for "we shall be like Him," when "we shall Him as He is." And this glorious life is offered to us on the simple condition of faith in Jesus Christ.

A Model Minister of Christ,

BY REV. THEODORE L. CUVLER, D. D.

During all the earlier years of my ministry the thumbed books in my library were Bunyan's *Pilgrim* and *The Life of Robert Murray McCheyne*, the youthful pastor of St. Peter's church, in Dundee. The *Life of McCheyne*—which was Dr. Andrew A. Bonar's masterpiece—was published during my theological seminary days, and from that hour to this it has been a perpetual inspiration. Dr. Chalmers' biography was a gold mine; Dr. Norman McLeod's is brilliant with poetry and power, but rather too surcharged with hilarity. To spend an hour with Dr. Edward Payson, of Portland, is almost like sitting with Paul in his "hired house" at Rome; but his seraphic piety was mournfully tinged by his morbid temperament. McCheyne's piety was eminently

healthful, cheerful, and saintly without being sanctimonious. He dwelt during the nine years of his fruitful ministry far away from the damps that arise about Doubling Castle, and hard by the Beulahland where the sunlight ever falls. Robertson, of Brighton, saddens me while he stimulates me; but the biography of McCheyne has a rare power to sober me when tempted to trifle, and to cheer me when tempted to despondency.

To the younger ministers who are coming on the stage it may be necessary to say, in brief, that Robert Murray McCheyne was the pastor of the Presbyterian church of St. Peter's, in Dundee, and was called away to his crown a few weeks before the disruption of the Scottish National Church in 1843. He entered the vineyard at twenty-one—hungry for the salvation of souls. After nine years of intense, earnest and untiring labor he was laid—amid the tears of thousands—in that tomb at the corner of his little church which has been visited by weeping thousands during the last half century. His parish was composed of the plain people; and the wife of a poor weaver told me that it did her "more good just to see Mr. McCheyne walk up the Isle to his pulpit than to hear a sermon from another man." His personality was a power; his life more eloquent than any discourse he ever delivered. To pray and to search the word of God, to carry the hidden fire from house to house, to prepare the beaten oil for the sanctuary, to plead with dying men, and to allure to brighter worlds by the joyous up-tread of his own heavenward march—these formed the varied yet unchanging employment of his fervid spirit. With what eager joy he leaped into the bosom of the Scriptures! No cavils of the critics ever disturbed his impregnable faith in the adamant Word. "When you write to me," said he to a friend, "tell me all you can about the meaning of the Scriptures. One gem from that ocean is worth all the pebbles of earthly streams."

Love of Jesus Christ was his master passion. His Saviour's work was his work; he never wearied, and he never rested. Every hour he gave to his Master. The celebrated Dr. James Hamilton, of London, who was his intimate friend, once told me that McCheyne used to seal his letters with the device of a sun going down behind the mountains and the motto over it, "The night cometh." For souls he watched as the fisherman's wife trims her lamp in the window and watches for the storm tossed and belated husband in the offing. He hoisted the light of Calvary; and like Spurgeon, it was his life's joy to welcome the returning wanderers into the "covert from the tempest." In prayer he was a mighty and prevailing wrestler. He prayed before he sat down to his studies; before he went out to visit the sick; before he entered his pulpit; he had what he called a "scheme of prayer," and marked the name of missionaries on his map that he might pray for them in course and by name. Literally he walked with God. In writing to a friend he said: "Now remember that Moses when he came down from the mount, wist not that the skin of his face shone. Looking at our own shining face is the bane of the spiritual life and of the ministry. Oh, for closest communion with God, till soul and body—head, face and heart—shine with divine brilliancy; but oh, for a holy ignorance of our own shining!"

A few years ago I visited Dundee, and preached in the pulpit of St. Peter's church. After the service the provost of the city in-