

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

SAMUEL, THE UPRIGHT JUDGE.*

By Rev. Prof. MacKenzie, B.D.,
Montreal.

Sanctified Eleazar . . . to keep the ark of the Lord, v. 1. Was it a life's work that was worth while, this caring for the ark of the Lord? The call to Eleazar corresponds to what would be nowadays a call to the Christian ministry, the devotion of one's life to the service of God. Is this worth while? It depends on what one counts worth while. If it is worth while to become a partner with God in the task of making the world God-like—drawing men away from sin, leading them to holiness; then it is truly worth while; for there is nothing on earth greater than a man, and there is no greater height a man can attain to than God-likeness, and there is no employment more worthy of man and therefore more worth while, than helping his fellow men to that lofty attainment.

If ye do return unto the Lord, . . . then put away the strange gods, v. 3. Repentance must be more than lip-deep, if it is to be genuine. The act must correspond to the word. There must be no dallying with strange gods; the penitent must come with clean hands and pure heart, as well as with pious expression. A repentance that consists in a changed life is the only repentance that God will accept, or men recognize.

I will pray for you, v. 5. What a man will do in a crisis is a good criterion of what the man is. Samuel's proposal makes clear these three things. (1) That he believed in prayer: looked upon it as the first and strongest weapon against an enemy. (2) That he loved his people: the national spirit was strong in him. He was a patriot in deed. (3) His record must have been clear; otherwise the proposal to pray unto the Lord for them would have meant only derision; for none recognize more keenly than prayerless men that the only one who has a right to pray for others is the person who has first prayed for himself, and who is living out his prayers.

Cease not to cry unto the Lord for us, v. 8. It was the appeal of fear. They were thoroughly terrified, these Israelites; and their terror drove them Godward for shelter. They had been straying away after idols. It was only their fright that sent them to God for succor. But better go Godward through terror, than not at all. The most awful revelations of the day of wrath and of the woes following it which the Scriptures contain, are from the lips of the loving Saviour. One ought to thank God for anything which turns his face Godward.

The Philistines drew near to battle . . . but the Lord thundered, v. 10. When God takes sides in a controversy, there is no doubt as to the final issue. God and one man are a majority, even with millions opposed. A fact, this, to give courage to the hard-beset soldier of the cross. The cause in which he has enlisted can do nought but triumph. What matters it if evil men, and the very angels of darkness themselves, are against us, if God be for us? He will await His time; but when the hour has arrived, one word from His lips, and the strongest foe falls.

Hitherto hath the Lord helped us, v. 12. It was worth while raising up this "stone of help;" for it became a lever-

age to completer trust in God, and more faithful service. He hath helped; therefore, because of His goodness, we shall be more unreservedly His. Hitherto; then for the time to come, also, He may have confidence. What God has done for us we may accept as a foretaste and guarantee of what He will do.

So the Philistines . . . came no more, v. 13. Is there any final fight with sin? Can we vanquish it quite, so that it shall not again molest us? So far as we know, not in this world. Even to the very latest instant of life, the great enemy of souls pursues us. He has no shame in taking advantage of the weakness of a dying man. But "each victory will help us some other to win." Satan may be invincible; he is not invulnerable. Steadfast resistance on our part wears his strength, even as it increases ours. The battle with temptation—and oh, how sore, and long drawn out a battle it is! has this of hope in it, that the sturdier fight we make, the less likely is the attack to be repeated.

The hand of the Lord was against the Philistines, v. 13.—God is absolutely impartial. He was against the Philistines because of their wickedness. When God's punishments fall upon us, we should not complain. They are deserved; otherwise they would not have come. Not complaint, but repentance, is the proper answer to the judgments of the Almighty. He smites, only when He must; and His greatest joy is ceasing to smite, because the smitten one has forsaken his sin.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER.

Our Father:

We thank thee for His coming. Over the wearied world the song still sings itself—"Good will to men." There is a light in the sky, the star still shines, the wise men are still guided, the angels are still singing.

We are glad he came. Love's stronger, sacrifice easier, devotion earnest, brotherhood meaningful. There is fresh strength for the struggle, courage in the face of fear, faith in the face of doubt, hope in the face of despair.

We are glad he came. There is a light for tomorrow, keen life for the children, victory for the toiler, rest for the weary, a pillow for the outworn, hope for the aged, heaven for the dying.

Our prayer is toward Thee. May the Christ-child make us tender and pitiful; may the Christ-love woo and win us to love for the needy and the distressed; may the Christ-example send us to the harvest fields; may the Christ-sacrifice inspire us with the spirit of self-giving and self-forgetfulness.

Give us the secret of his love, the joy of his obedience, the spirit of his devotion, the power of his sacrifice.

Temper our moods this day. Save us from ourselves. May our selfishness and our pride be overcome. May we have the humility of the shepherds, the worship of the wise men, the vision of Simeon and Anna.

May Christ be born in many hearts today.

In His Name, Amen.

Luke speaks of an angel that illuminated the pasture-fields, and John (Rev. 18:1), speaks of an angel that lightened the whole world; but the Babe is doing more than that. He is drawing all men unto him, and filling the heart of the world with his peace and hope.

A MEDITATION.

O Christ-Child of the world's heart, Man for the world's redemption, Son of God with the power of the resurrection filling Thee; this is Thy hour. The heart longs for Thee; the eyes wait for a sight of Thy salvation, bringing joy into life: the bells of cathedrals chime the Noel melody; the world that knows Thee looks Thy way, and as the day draws nigh that beats Thy name we can but think of the resounding voice of the angel host and of the hastening feet of astonished shepherds wending their way toward the manger and the Child.

Born in Bethlehem! How? How comes any life? Whence comes the soul? Is each new soul a new creation of Almighty power? Is it the body only whose law we know? And do we know it? Can we tell the secret of parentage? "Who can finger the gossamer links by which the mannikin feels its way out from the shore of the great unknown, blind and wailing and alone, into the light of day?" Where in that progress does the soul overtake it? Does God still breathe into man's nostrils the breadth of life, and is man thus a living soul? Do you say Yes to these questions? Then here, too, is miracle. Here is the supernatural. Here is the supervening of God upon a mortal form. A thousand miracles every hour of waking and sleeping time. And why not in the long rolling ages one miracle that brought Christ through the gate of motherhood a wholly new creation, body, mind and spirit? No; not a new creation; but an incarnation by creative act. For thou art eternal, oh Christ. Thy soul is an uncreated soul, Thy being is one unbeginning, since Thou art and wert from before the foundation of the world. Born of a woman; but the creative act of soul and body, Thine, Thine alone, oh Lord God Almighty.

I sit before the open fire in my boyhood's home. The hour draws nigh: the birth of Christ. The world is white outside, and the woodfire burns clear. The pencils of the flame paint pictures on the background of my thought. There are shepherds sleeping; there are shepherds watching; there are shepherds going to see this thing which the Lord had made known to them. Oh, shepherds: teach us your lesson. We see the picture which the flame pencils paint, but we cannot enter into the conception of your wondrous faith. Ye go to see. Not to see it. But to see. And we reason and doubt and argue and sometimes make utter shipwreck of our faith against the jagged headlands of a doubting brain. Simple shepherds. Believing shepherds. There were none to tell you then that no such story could be true. The devil was too amazed that Christ-midnight to think of stopping you as ye went to Bethlehem to see: not to ask, but to see: not to argue, but to see: not to doubt, but to see. God had burst into life that night, the enemy was taken by surprise. He knew the hour would come sometime. God told him so, long, long before, in the primeval time. But God did not tell him when. And he knows his hour has come for struggle. He will elay that baby lying in Bethlehem's manger some day, but he can never again get God out of this world: never again make the struggle against sin hopeless: nevermore go unlimited in his assaults, his hupewrecking assaults on human souls.

How the world rejoices over the story of the shepherds. What thousands of hearts, yea, what millions of hearts will

*S.S. LESSON, December 22 1907:—1 Samuel 7: 1-13. Commit to memory vs. 12, 13. Read 1 Samuel, chs. 5 to 7. Golden Text:—Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only.—1 Samuel 7: 3.