

# The Quiet Hour

(For Dominion Presbyterian.)

## Esra's Journey to Jerusalem.\*

By Rev. Prof. Jordan, D.D.

This is one of the most important incidents of the "second exodus." It is interesting and valuable as a part of the history of this period, and as illustrating the noble conviction of the great scribe expressed in the Golden Text. This mission took place in the early years of the fifth century B.C. We have here the preparations for the journey; the solemn fast at the starting point; careful provision made for the custody of valuable things belonging to the House of God; the journey and arrival at Jerusalem. Rest with prayer at the beginning, rest with praise at the close and between a toilsome, dangerous journey entered upon for a high patriotic and religious purpose. There are many details to be discussed in connection with this portion of the history that we cannot deal with now, it will be sufficient if we grasp its main outlines clearly, and catch the spirit of the great leader. Esra bulks largely in Jewish history and tradition. According to one tradition he is said to have re-written the five books of Moses after they had been lost. That particular tradition has little value, but the result of modern research is to make the figure of this noble man stand out more clearly as in some sense a second Moses; and, as on the literary and ecclesiastical side, the founder of Judaism. The Jews, such of them as desired this, were allowed by favor of an Imperial edict to leave Babylon and return to their own land. Many welcomed this as a great gift of the eternal God, who overrules the acts of kings. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of God, who made heaven and earth." With this sigh of relief and in this spirit of hope, Esra set out upon his great work.

This incident represents a very high type of piety. In it we have united business ability and religious fervour; an intense spirit of devotion and a scrupulous care for orderliness in the arrangement of temporal affairs. These things are sometimes in danger of being separated and when this takes place the result may be both fanaticism and dishonesty.

Esra mustered his forces at the river Abara, perhaps a canal or tributary of the Euphrates; and there he made preparation for the long journey to Jerusalem, knowing well that the Jews who had already returned stood in great need of religious sympathy and practical help.

We can see now that it was of the highest importance not only for the Jews, but also for the human race, that Jerusalem should again become a centre of religious life until the coming of the Christ. It was not so easy for men to see that then. To the great politicians of the world such a movement was a very small thing concerning only a few big-gotted Jews. To those Jews whose faith had been destroyed by the shocks of change it

seemed a hopeless thing, but men who had the spirit of faith were convinced that God had still a mission for his chosen people and a great part for them to play. Without such deep conviction men like Esra could not have done their work. The mode of procedure in this case shows that the conviction was intelligent as well as devout. Note then:

(1) Esra's jealousy for the honor of God. He had given to the king a glowing picture of the glory and faithfulness of Jehovah, and he felt that to ask for a band of soldiers to protect the caravan would look as if he had no faith that God would protect them. It was not an army that he needed, only a little police protection, as the road was infested with robbers. There would have been no moral wrong in asking for such protection, but we feel that Esra's words express a high sentiment and a noble example. Let the Church to-day beware of bringing shame upon religion by trusting too much in external government and too little in the grace and power of God.

(2) Sober preparation for a great task. This fast is not a pagan form of propitiating God, but a moral discipline; an earnest and intelligent seeking for Divine help. True saints do not undertake fierce battles and heavy tasks in a flippant, light-hearted fashion.

(3) Methodical arrangement. The silver and gold is weighed and committed to proper custodians. Esra had no objection to "balance sheets." He knew that honest, devout men like to have things done in a business-like way, that the responsibility may be properly apportioned and the duties rightly discharged.

(4) The successful end of an important expedition. Those who had united earnest prayer with diligent, thoughtful toil were brought by God's gracious providence to their desired haven; they sat down in peace before the gates of Jerusalem, knowing that they owed great gratitude to God and that their real work was but begun. "They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people, from this time forth and for evermore."

Opportunities are opportunities only to him who is ready.—Anon.

### Keeping in Touch With God.

A missionary from South Africa said he one morning saw a converted African chieftain sitting under a palm-tree, with his Bible open before him.

Every now and then he cast his eyes on his book and read a passage. Then he paused and looked up a little while, and his lips were seen to be in motion. Thus he continued alternately to look down on the Scriptures and turn his eyes towards heaven.

The missionary passed by without disturbing the good man, but after a little while he mentioned to him what he had seen, and asked him why it was that sometimes he looked up. This was the African's reply:

"I look down to the book, and God speaks to me. Then I look up in prayer, and I speak to the Lord. So we keep up in this way a holy talk with each other."

### Words That Tell.

By Anna D. Walker.

Eloquence and pathos are often strikingly unfolded to us in the intercourse of everyday life. Pathos is often shown in the adaptation of Scripture to occasions. A dear friend was weeping over the loss of her life companion when a sister cried: "Be still, M—, be still! This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." One wrote to us of her mother: "My mother will soon be where there are pleasures for evermore." A pastor's wife died, a sweet, fair little woman, scarcely more than a girl for age. The pastor was stricken with sore grief. A good minister filled that pastor's pulpit while the wife lay dead in the house. How forcible were his words as he cried, "There is a voice come from that parsonage, 'Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh, ye my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!'" How many times do we hear regarding the death of a young child, "He took them up in his arms and blessed them," or, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." When a fair young maiden dies how appropriate does it seem to the ear, the exclamation, "She is not dead, but sleepeth!"

When old and godly is taken away we hear, "He has come to the grave in a full age as a shock of corn cometh in its season." And when some great and notable soul goes out, "A prince and a great man has fallen in Israel." Such examples of Scripture quotations might be multiplied indefinitely, for Scripture has wonderful adaptive power.

There are eloquence, pathos, poetry in every-day conversation, and to one who watches for these a constant series of surprises. Our humdrum neighbor, bent on her own art, house-keeping, brings forth a saying so pat that we exclaim, "Why, I never thought of that before!" Another, of local note for good sense and humor, enriches us every time we meet her. One gives us a text of Scripture with an application so novel to us that the word gains a fresh meaning, is more than we had thought it to be. Emerson says: "We owe many valuable observations to people who are not very acute or profound, and who say the thing without effort which we want and have been long hunting in vain."

"Don't spoil your visit for a handful of minutes," cried a poor Irish woman. "What's the world to a man when his wife is a widow," said a man of the same nationality.

What do we learn from these thoughts? That conversation is of untold value—a whetstone to the intellect, a feeder of the mind, a precious comfort to the bereaved, an added joy to the joyous, an especial help to the soul who is every ready to seize what will aid him in his course toward heaven. Also we learn here not to despise those in lowly station, for how often do we in conversation learn from such lowly ones. They have their words of power, they have some knowledge that we do not possess. They, perchance, as Emerson says, may give us the words for which we have been hunting.

"She did not know what she had given,

I took it silently,

A word that led me on toward heaven,

My friend bestowed on me.

She did not know, all unaware,

She helped me shun that sin,

And led me past that hateful snare,

That else had drawn me in."

Our Sabbaths are cases where we may drink of the pure water that flows from the heavenly mountains and eat of the fruits that grow on the trees of God, and thus be prepared to go out into the world for six days' journey over the hot sands.—J. R. Miller, D.D.

\*International S.S. Lesson for October 22, Esra viii., 21-32. Read chapter 7, 8; 15-36.

Golden Text—The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.—viii., 22.