

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterians.

* Daniel in the Den of Lions.

There have been many discussions concerning the book of Daniel, the date and details of the hero's life, the explanation of the visions, the language and style of the document; it may be that unanimity of opinion can never be reached on these subjects, but there is one fact that can never be disputed, viz. that the name of Daniel has become a symbol for moral courage, faithfulness to duty and loyalty to clear conviction. His noble figure has been an inspiration through many ages, the influence of his life has helped many a young man in the critical hour. The popular hymn which calls us to "dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone," may not have great merit as a piece of poetry but the ideal that it represents and the power that it demands is of a high order. There are great crowds who follow the fashion, and go with the stream, but these are not creative spirits, or reformers and saviours of society. The world as well as the Church owes much to the men who received from God the power to think for themselves, to have learnt convictions and to be true and steady in the hour of danger. Whether it is Daniel, Peter, Paul, Luther or Knox "the sacred right of rebellion" is rightly exercised by men who feel that they must obey God rather than men. By such men was won for us the right to pray to our own God in our own way.

This is a picture of deliberate action, it is fearless but not frantic; it is the action of a man who has thought out the matter in the presence of God, who having had his secret Gethsemane is prepared for the public arena. He does not desire publicity but when the challenge is thrown down he must accept it; it will not meet the case in its present stage for him to pray to Jehovah in secret and seem to honor the god of his king in public. As a rule our prayer should be private and unostentatious, but there may be a time for the saint to pray three times a day with his window open toward Jerusalem. True religion as well as real patriotism expressed itself in that act. It was done not in a flutter of excitement but from a strong conviction. It means that there are laws higher than the so-called changeless laws of "Medes and Persians," that there is a king greater than the King of Babylon, that there is something more to be feared than a den of hungry lions. We all profess to believe these things but it is men of the Daniel type who have proved the reality of these beliefs. When so proved they command respect; wise kings know that the men of honest convictions are their best servants and that to persecute such men is bad policy. In a moment of thoughtlessness this king was led to do a thing which caused him sorrow, to set brute force against force of soul, and to try to coerce a man whose body might be crushed but whose soul could not be made to bow before idols. Victory in such a contest would be lost to the king and could by no means prove the superiority of the king's religion, at the best or worst it could only show that in the physical sphere a lion is stronger than a man, a thing well known before.

There is also another truth of a higher order which the Saints had proved before, but which needs to be constantly manifested and believed, than a man, a thing well known before.

*S.S. Lesson for July 30th, Dan. 6, 10-23. Golden Text: "The Lord is thy Keeper," Psalm *21, 5.

deliver those who trust in Him. The men who have lived the greatest careers and rendered the greatest service to the Church have had this strong conviction. James is delivered by having the martyr's crown awarded to him. John is delivered by being preserved for a long life of service. Paul is delivered from shipwreck that in due time he may be "offered up," apparently a victim of persecution, but really a sacrifice of faith. In this case the king may be anxious and careworn for fear of losing a good servant and because he has been entrapped into doing a wicked, foolish thing, but the prophet can await his fate with calm confidence, knowing that the pathway of duty leads to glory and to God. There was, however, a larger deliverance than that of any individual. Babylon, with all its worldly splendor, passed away and crumbled into ruins, but Israel seemingly weak and insignificant, went forth to a great vocation because she possessed a great revelation, forms of truth and modes of worship which inspired men to Daniel-like faith and conduct. Brute force cannot conquer the truth; the Church cast into the fiery furnace or thrust into the den of lions comes out purer and stronger. The laws of the Medes and Persians cannot prevail against the laws of God. There is only one abiding rock and perfect refuge and blessed are those of whom it may be said "the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms."

God Knoweth Best.

By Mary Wheaton Lyon.

The gates of life swing either way
On noiseless hinges night and day.
One enters through the open door,
One leaves it to return no more.

And which is happier, which more blest,
God knoweth best.

We greet with smiles the one who comes
Like sunshine to our hearts and homes,
And reach out longing hands with tears
To him who in his ripened years
Goes gladly to his heavenly rest.
God knoweth best.

He guards the gates. We need not dread
The path these little feet must tread,
Not fear for him who from our sight
Passed through them to the realms of light.
Both in His loving care we rest.
God knoweth best.

* The New Heart.

Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, and he exercised his ministry among the captives in Babylon. He was a priest as well as a prophet, and as we may see from this lesson he has something of real poetic power. As with ourselves, sorrow had different effects on different people in the Babylonian exile. Some were made sincerely penitent as they thought upon the great calamities which had come upon their nation and others were stirred to bitter rebelliousness of heart. Some learned in the day of adversity a purer patriotism, and others turned to seek satisfaction in commercial activity and worldly greed. Some turned from idols to serve the living God, while others were ensnared by an ever baser

*S.S. Lesson for August 6. Ezek. 36, 25-36. Golden Text—"A new heart also will I give you."

idolatry. The prophet had no easy time among these exiles; he often wept in bitterness of soul, but he maintained in the darkest days a mighty faith. God would give back to His people their land and restore to them their temple hence they must wait upon Him and prepare for the blessing. In the words which we are studying the prophet draws near to the Evangelical standpoint; he recognizes in his own way two great truths, that a prepared people is needed as well as a prepared place, and that the most important element of preparation is a new heart. Many Jews felt their national pride wounded when they thought how they had lost their place and power as a people; like their successors in the days of Our Lord they longed for political freedom and prestige, and they were slow to believe that there was something much more important, viz. moral cleansing and renewal. The prophet might have been popular if he had been content to dwell on the prospects of political restoration and to picture in glowing colors a great and brilliant national future, but it was always the prophet's duty to make prominent the unpopular and neglected truth. He puts the truth in a form which ought to have ensured for it a glad, grateful acceptance, and which makes it still appropriate and powerful. It is a promise from the living God to His needy people. A promise of cleansing. Clean water shall be sprinkled upon the people to wash away the filthiness of impure worship and wicked living. Though we are innocent or such actual and abominable idolatry, we in a very real sense, need this promise. To make us fit to appear in God's presence and to offer acceptable homage, we need to be washed. Heb. x. 22. Then there is the promise of a new heart; instead of the stony heart shall be given a heart of flesh. Note that Ezekiel does not, like Paul, use the word "flesh" as meaning the base and sensual nature; to him it means the human and the humane. Sin is really unnatural, inhuman, degenerate. God will take away the cold, cruel, selfish heart and give a true human heart, according to God's thought of what man's heart should be. Note further that in the Old Testament the heart does not mean, as in modern usage, the feelings, or emotional side of human nature but the whole spiritual life. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." The promise therefore indicates a complete renewal of the moral nature. A new principle of life is to be given, even the spirit of the living God, and this shall bring about a new social life, causing the people to walk in the way of God's commands and manifest in their conduct the true religion. The reason we see proceeds upon the high principle, "Seek first the Kingdom of God"; it prophesies first of righteousness and then of blessing. "And ye shall dwell in the land I gave to your fathers, and ye shall be my people and I will be your God." After this comes the promise of material prosperity, and the people with the new heart will be ready for it and they will make the right use of it (Verse 31). It will not have the influence which too often goes with prosperity of making them swell with pride and glory in their own good fortune as favorites of heaven. The very abundance of the blessing will make them feel the more their infirmity and their wretched unworthiness. In this they do well, for, as the prophet informs them, it is not their merit which has brought this abundance of blessing, but the sovereign grace of the God whom they have neglected. God will fulfill his kindly purpose and manifest his glory. "The heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places and plant that which was desolate." Election is not of merit but of grace, and it is not that the elect should be filled with self-satisfied pride but that through their grateful service God may reach the heathen. If we can say "not more than others we deserve but God has given us more," we should also strive to render the more abundant service to the glory of Him who is our Redeemer and King.