

## The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

### Gracious Invitations.\*

These are indeed gracious words, spoken by one who knew the sin and shame of his people. Hosea is the prophet of love, and hence the prophet of the broken heart and of tears. He was a man of keen sympathies, a man who loved God and cared for the people; and so his prophecy is full of heart-throbs of mingled indignation and pity, of scorn and sorrow, of fear and hope. There is such a violent contrast between this and the preceding chapter that some critics have been tempted to think that Hosea did not himself write these "gracious words." But the book is not a polished discourse, it consists of broken fragments, scattered recollections of his great ministry; and we know that Hosea, from his persons' experience and religious beliefs, was led to cling with devout passion to the hope that God would not completely cast off his people. One of the great lessons that this prophet lived to teach was the patient tenderness, the unconquerable long-suffering of Jehovah. He could not be content, then, to denounce the sin of the people, he must yearn over them, weep over them, and again and again beseech them to return unto God in true penitence of heart. There is no prophet who, more than Hosea, enters into the woes of the people in the spirit of Christ.

The Invitation.—It is a call to return to God. The prophet shows how far the people have wandered, and turned their glory to shame; no superficial reformation can save them, only a real turning to God. The words of the well known paraphrase represent faithfully Hosea's attitude in relation to the nation, "Come, let us to the Lord our God, with contrite hearts return." This invitation was the only thing to meet the need of Northern Israel; because they did not heed it they were lost and the words of their great prophet have come to us through the care of Judah, whom they despised. But the words are as pertinent as ever, only a true turning to God can meet our personal and social need. But it seems a strange exhortation to take words and turn to the Lord; words seem such poor, empty things. These people lavished rich gifts on their gods, they sought satisfaction in a luxurious ritual, they were not content with words;

they were very religious, but their religion was impure, and their social life corrupt. Intelligent, true, strong, sincere words may in such a case be a noble sacrifice. It requires knowledge to find the right words, and courage to speak them in the face of man and God. Our God has given us such great words that we may surely find right words of response. The prophet longs for fruit of his ministry, and what better fruit can there be than this, that the people should receive their message and make the right reply; that prophecy should turn into prayer. The prophet will teach his disciples how to pray; it may not be the rich, all comprehensive prayer which come from the lips of the Christ centuries later, but it is a noble prayer. These, then, are words of prayer; it contains the most important request, that iniquity may be altogether taken away. That is the true forgiveness, to remove both the guilt and power of sin. We have fuller knowledge of God's dealings in this regard, but Hosea had the same deep sense of need. By their iniquity they had fallen, and only by confession and faith could they return. Let them bring to God the true spiritual sacrifice, and beg His acceptance of the same, thus they may render the fruit of their lips to Jehovah. This prayer is like all real prayer, a confession and a promise of amendment. Trust in Assyria and Egypt is renounced when the nation casts itself upon the mercy of God. They had been too prone to trust in the horses and chariots of great foreign powers; they did not understand their true vocation, but, when God gives them a new heart, they will know that though they are isolated in the world, and are, apparently, orphans, they have, in the divine mercy, a rich inheritance. This is not mere conjecture, vain speculation, the prophet can speak in the name of his God, and when the people turn, and rend their hearts in true penitence, this will be the gracious answer, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. For mine anger is turned away from him," etc. "It is not our gifts that can win God's love; that comes spontaneously of His own loving nature. As the nightmist which gives fruitfulness and fragrance to a land swept and scorched by the hot, dry wind, so shall God be to His people; the barren desert of their national life shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. The exact order of the speech or dialogue in verse 8 is difficult to settle, but the sense is clear that Ephraim shall learn to shake himself clear of

idois, and shall find that his source of strength and fruitfulness is in God; then life shall have new meaning and fresh power. Verse 9 is a proper conclusion; only by spiritual wisdom can we understand these things, and it is the highest wisdom thus to accept the will of God, and to acknowledge that the ways of the Lord are right. Many think that this verse is a prose comment on the beautiful poetic prophecy, written by some scribe who felt himself carried away by Hosea's great words; if so, it is the Amen of the devout reader; and it represents the spirit in which we shall receive this wonderful prophecy, and apply it to our own life, to the life of the Church, and of our individual experience. Only by the wisdom that comes of fearing God can we know the power of real forgiveness and the nature of real spiritual worship.

Only grant my soul may carry high through  
death her cup unspilled,  
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's  
loss drop by drop distilled,  
I shall boast it mine—the balsam; bless each  
kindly wretch that wrung  
From life's tree its utmost virtue, tapped the  
root whence pleasure sprung,  
Barked the bole and broke the bough and  
bruised the berry, left all grace  
Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir  
in its place. —Robert Browning.

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### The Secret of Christian Peace.

By Rev. B. B. Williams.

Everybody knows what it is to be disquieted—sometimes greatly disquieted.

We can easily remember a time when everything outside of us seemed as though it had entered into a sort of conspiracy to trouble us. Here were vexations great and small; there were losses and disappointments; ungracious things were said and done against us by those whom we supposed to be friends, good and true. In these circumstances we were strongly tempted to long for dove wings that we might fly away in search of rest.

Or we can just as easily remember a time when, notwithstanding favorable surroundings, we were sorely restless; the heart was ill at ease. However unwilling to admit it, there were within us passions that made the soul more like a stormy sea than aught besides. We looked at things with morally jaundiced eyes and therefore received wrong impressions of everything.

At such a time we met with these words: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee," or these words, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you." As we read and re-read these words they seemed to us to be brimful of heaven's music and there was stirred up in us a passionate longing that found expression thus: "Oh that this peace was ours; perfect Peace in this dark world of sin!"

\*International Sunday-school lesson for July 2nd: Hosea 14: 1-9. Golden Text: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord.—Hosea vi., 1; Read. x., 1-13.