

The Quiet Hour.

Moses and Pharaoh.

S. S. LESSON.—Dec. 8, 1901; Exodus 11: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Isa. 63: 9. The angel of his presence saved them.

BY REV. J. MCD. DUNCAN, B. D.

Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt, v. 1. As long as possible God holds back the final blow. His mercy gave Pharaoh and his people opportunity after opportunity to escape the crowning punishment. But the obstinacy of the king made these opportunities of no avail, and the reluctance of God to smite gave way before Pharaoh's sullen defiance. God sends us the smaller and bricier sorrows of this life to turn us from sin, so that there may be no occasion to inflict on us the more terrible and enduring suffering of another life. It is only our folly in hardening ourselves under present trials that makes future woe inevitable.

Afterwards he will let you go hence, v. 2. The delays were good for Israel. A fire brigade is trained for real service by means of false alarms. Pretended a saults develop in a garrison the readiness which stands them in good stead when a real attack is made. Each preparation of the Israelites to depart would reveal the weak points in their organization, which delay would enable them to strengthen. We can often learn more from our failures than from our successes. Failures wisely used are stepping stones to success. We ought not to be disappointed if God sometimes allows us to fail in work for Him. He is simply preparing us for doing the work better.

Let them ask every one of his neighbour, v. 2. (Rev. Ver). Boldness is born of faith. When we hear the voice of God commanding us, the fear of man vanishes. What was more unlikely than that the oppressing Egyptians should yield so tamely to the demands of the Israelitish slaves? The power of God reversed the position of slaves and masters. The same power will level to the plain every great mountain that stands in the way of our doing His bidding (Zech. 4: 7). He who moved the Egyptians to give the Israelites jewels of silver and of gold, instead of curses and blows, can turn our weakness into strength, our defeats into victories.

Moreover the man Moses was very great, v. 3. "Now the man Moses was very great," (Num. 12: 3). Moses was not wanting in meekness because he wrote of himself that he was "very great." For he did not ascribe his greatness to any actions of his own. He was great because he was an agent of God, who alone is great in Himself. It is one thing to claim greatness on account of what we do ourselves, it is another to make this claim because of what God has done by us. It does not prove the absence, but the presence of meekness to claim a greatness which is merely derived and reflected.

Thus saith the Lord . . . I will go out into the midst of Egypt, v. 4. Hitherto God had been sending his agents out into Egypt, and the nine lesser plagues had been the result. Now He was to go Himself and every firstborn of man and beast would perish. Sickness, loss, misfortune, are sent upon us sometimes as the penalty of sin. If we think these messengers so dreadful, how shall we dare to meet Him who sends them? Wiser far it is to heed the warning voice of trials

and sorrows than make it needful for God Himself to come forth in judgment.

And all the first born in the land of Egypt shall die, v. 5. This was the final sentence passed upon the Egyptians. They had despised all warnings and now the blow of judgment must descend upon them. Long afterwards, Israel itself was rejected. John tells us in his gospel (12: 36-40), of a time when Jesus, having failed to convince the Jews by miracle and discussion; withdrew from them into the companionship of His own disciples. The God who once judged the Egyptians afterwards judged Israel. There is no caprice or favoritism in God's judgments.

The Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel, v. 9. Yes, and the Lord it is who puts a difference between us who live in Canada and the heathen in China. It has been pointed out that, if Paul had turned eastward instead of westward from Troas (Acts 16: 9-13) the Eastern nations might have been the Christians, and the Western, the heathen nations of today. It was the Lord who directed the feet of Paul westward instead of eastward. To Him we owe all the blessings of our Christian civilization.

And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger, v. 8. Moses was angry and sinned not (Eph. 4: 26). Pharaoh had besought him with the most abject entreaties to remove plague after plague and he had yielded. In spite of these deliverances the king had been guilty of the basest treacheries. Then he had just before, as a crowning insult, ordered Moses out of his presence (Exod. 10: 28). It was right for Moses, as it is for us, to be angry at such cowardice and falseness and tyranny. There is such a thing as hating nobly.

And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, v. 10. But the Lord only chose for Pharaoh what Pharaoh had chosen for himself. It is a law that evil acts harden into evil habits. The gambler who first hesitatingly puts down a small stake, in the end risks his fortune. The drunkard who only intends at first to take a glass or two ends by sacrificing everything to his appetite. So Pharaoh hardened his own heart by his own acts of cruelty and deceit, according to a law of God. Is there so much difference, after all, in saying that a thing is done according to a law of God and saying that God does the thing?

A Meditation.—1 Cor. 3: 16.

BY REV. GEORGE W. MONTGOMERY.

Lord God, Thou madest me,
Not for myself, but Thee;
Help me to know Thee in my heart,
To choose, like one, "that better part,"

Lord God, Thou needest me,
Both for the world and Thee;
Accept my heart for Thee alone,
For all my sins Thou didst atone.

Lord God of love, help me
To work and live for Thee;
Fill all my heart, make it Thy home,
"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,"

Then in Thy glory, Lord,
According to Thy word:
With all the ransomed host call me
To rest in heaven, to dwell with Thee."

As To Amusements.

BY REV. JOHN B. WILSON.

Allow me to recall two pictures in memory's picture gallery—one is luminous with the glory of God, David dancing before the ark. It is a great day in Israel; the ark that had been taken by the Philistines is sent back in terror; it is now being conducted with great solemnity and gladness to the City of David; 30,000 warriors accompany it; before the ark David, the Shepherd boy, now the shepherd of Israel, dances in soul delight and holy triumph.

I uncover another picture with an awful grandness about it—a sort of Titanic greatness. The scene is in a royal palace in the same land; a banquet is in progress; Herod and his high lords are assembled. Salome, the graceful princess, is brought in to dance. The lords are enchanted; hearts heated with wine follow every motion with lustful gaze. Herod forgets crown and throne as he swears, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee."

In these two pictures we have two principles and two types of enjoyment, and it becomes the Christian, man or woman, to ascertain concerning any particular amusement as to which class it belongs; for the honest inquirer, then, is this rule: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

No doubt it would be very convenient to have a catalogue of all lawful amusements hung up in the closet for consultation. But then, what of the unlawful use of lawful things, for there may be nothing wrong in the amusement itself, but much danger and evil in its surroundings; there may be no evil in its surroundings, yet much to you, because of moral weakness. For every one, even though he be a Christian, has within him "the old man," with all his lusts, like hungry hounds demanding to be fed, and a part of the Christian's life consists in denying himself and living to the will of God.

Note the differences in opinion in regard to the pastimes, pleasures and pursuits among the professed followers of Christ. One may be found in a saloon; I will not say that such a man cannot be a Christian, for I remember that Lot dwelt in Sodom, but I do say, "A strange place for a follower of Christ." Others will be found in the ball-room. Some will not dance themselves, but have their children taught. Of such cases I cannot help but think that if the daughter of Herodias had never learned to dance, Herod would have been kept from a fearful crime and John would have kept his head.

Other professing Christians may be found at the theaters, but there are others who would not dare attend theaters, but frequent the opera, if the amusement be associated with benevolence, to help the widow and the orphan. This union of amusement and mercy is the triumph of our age.

Then there are a select few who rise higher, both lay and clerical. These object to all such amusements, but they can attend the oratorio; the music is sacred, and it eases their conscience. These church members join in and listen with delight while the Word of God is profaned in song and the sufferings of Christ set to music, amid the cries of "Encore!" from the ungodly, who derive their highest enjoyment from the imitated cries and unspeakable agonies of the Lord of glory.

Now, concerning all such I refuse to judge. I refuse to draw the line between that which might appear right or wrong. I merely hold up this principle as a mirror, "All that ye do in word or deed, do all in