

The Quiet Hour.

The Lessons in Perspective.

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GOLDEN TEXT.—The Lord is merciful and gracious.—Ps. 103:8.

The division of the kingdom, like all events, has two aspects,—a human and a divine. It is brought about by man's folly and sin; it is brought about "of the Lord." Solomon's building mania, Rehoboam's arrogant folly, his blustering threats without power, to make them good, his resolve to ride roughshod over his people, were the wedges that split the tree, "the planting of Jehovah." An old tyrant and a young fool shattered the fair fabric. Destruction is easy. But there was, as always, a divine element. Strange that God should cast down what he had built up! But sin can thwart his purpose, and turn what he means to be blessings into curses, and then he has to "change his hand" and cast down what he has built up. The co-existence of God's sovereignty and man's freedom and responsibility is not less certain than inexplicable. Rehoboam sinned, but God wrought his designs through Rehoboam's sin. Natural consequences are divine chastisements.

In Lesson 2 we see Jeroboam as the type of a shrewd politician to whom all religions are equally true or untrue, and useful only as helping to political ends. He did not change the object of worship, but the manner of it. The calves were symbols of Jehovah. He professed to wish to lighten burdens in respect of religion also, and that would catch the multitude who always have liked a worship that calls for little sacrifice, as they do to-day. His policy was very clever, if he could have left God out of the reckoning, but, since he could not, it was a fatal mistake, and carried in itself the death sentence of his kingdom. He "devised of his own heart" his ritual; that was his first sin. He degraded religion to be a politician's tool; that was his second,—not quite out of date to-day. He brought in sensuous aids to Jehovah's worship; that was his third, to which this generation is especially prone.

Lesson 3 shows how obedience brings peace, and how faith brings victory. Asa's youthful energy swept all before him, as a strong man with strong convictions often does. It is still true that national godliness and national tranquillity are sisters. It is forever true that individual obedience brings individual peace. But nothing will prevent our having to fight, and the second part of the lesson shows that when we must fight, faith will bring victory. Asa's prayer rises by three flights to its height,—he knows his weakness, and grasps God's help; he pleads for it, on the double ground of faithful reliance and of devotion to the Name having brought him to this strait; he merges himself as combatant in God and casts on him the responsibility of the battle and the ignominy of defeat. Let us make God's cause ours, and he will make our cause his.

In Lesson 4 we have a very primitive and simple conception of a judge's office, which contrasts singularly with the modern one. The principles impressed by Jehoshaphat on his peasant judges were; the fear of the Lord would guide them right, and that they were to imitate Him in their decisions. They

were his delegates, and would have his help, if they behave as such. They were to copy his righteous judgments, putting favoritism and corruption far from them. Four qualities were to mark their actions,—first and fundamental to all, the fear of the Lord, which would ensure the second, faithfulness, and the third, "a perfect heart," and all these together would bring about the fourth, courage. The lesson is not needless, even in modern law courts, and the broad principle underlying it,—that religion is to be brought to bear on every department of life,—would revolutionize political and official, and, in fact, all life.

In Lesson 5 we come back to the Northern Kingdom, and see how inevitably a slight departure from strict obedience to God's law tends to become greater, as a divergence at an acute angle from a right line needs only to be produced far enough to be miles apart. It teaches us, too, how surely they who fling off God's yoke and break his bands asunder, sell themselves to a worse slavery. The miseries of the kingdom of Israel, with its royal murders, and its tyrant mushroom kings, were far greater than those which it had revolted to escape. Another lesson is the evil of entangling alliances. Jezebel brought Baal worship as her dowry. It was apparently good policy to make her father an ally, but bad religion is never good policy.

Elijah springs into the arena, in Lesson 6, with characteristic suddenness and impetuosity, the most impressive figure in the later history. The three scenes in the lesson show him in three strongly-contrasted lights. At Ahab's court, he is dauntless, stern and authoritative. He bears the king with his terrible message, reveals the secret of his daring, and towers above Ahab and his crew of courtiers because he is God's servant, conscious of ever standing in his presence, and of being ever girt to do his will. At Cherith, he is alone with God, feeding his soul by solitary communion, as we all must if we are to do his will in active life, and quietly dependent on him for daily needs. God owns his obligation to care for his servant. Elijah could close and open heaven's windows, but he needed to be fed by the ravens. At Zarephath, he was lapped for a time in the sweet calm peace of a home, and, no doubt, learned much that softened his lonely, austere nature. That quiet harbor must often have recurred, with calming remembrances, to him in the midst of his stormy life. He learned, too, the lesson that Jesus tried to teach from the incident,—that the God of Israel cared for, and had worshippers in, the world outside of Israel, and so had he had his horizon widened, as well as his heart softened.

The character of Obadiah, as drawn in Lesson 7, presents a religion that could blossom in unfavorable circumstances. Ahab's court was a strange place for a saint. We hear much to-day of the influence of "environment," but environment may work in two ways,—it may mold us to conformity, or it may rouse us to resistance, and it depends on ourselves which it does. The profoundest piety has often been developed in the most godless surroundings. Obadiah is an example, also, of the courage which true religion breeds. It was dangerous to stand between a furious queen and her victims, but this man dared to shelter her prey from a

tigress ready to spring. He is an example of a religion which began early, and which, probably on that account, could resist surroundings and could not fail.

Elijah on Carmel touches the highest point in his career. There is no more heroic figure in history than the solitary prophet fronting the crowds of Baal's priests and the gathered nation for all the long day, dominating them all through his unflinching faith and flaming zeal. Three phases in his actions are to be noted. First, his preparations for the sacrifice and his prayer. These bring out his intense conviction of the unity of the divided nation in his rearing the altar, his assurance of the coming miracle in his drenching the pile, his consuming longing for Israel's recognition of Jehovah, and, subordinate to that, his desire that he should be recognized as his servant, both of which desires blend together in his prayer. The second aspect is the command to kill every prophet of Baal which the people in the enthusiasm of their superficial and immediate "conversion" are ready to carry out. Better for them if they had wept and repented than that they should have waded back to Jehovah through a river of blood. Better that Kishon should have been swollen by tears than by that red tributary. But Elijah and they should be judged by the morality of their time, not by that of ours, and we must neither import Christian ethics into Ahab's reign to condemn the people, nor try to vindicate them as acting in accord with the nobler code which we have. The third aspect is the prayer for rain. The tension of the sacrifice and the fierce wrath of the massacre pass, and Elijah wrestles in prayer. He already had the promise that the rain would follow his appearing to Ahab, and he had already told Ahab that he heard the sound of its coming. Yet he prayed for it with concentrated earnestness, and thereby taught us that prayer is the hand that grasps promises and makes them facts.

Elijah's collapse of faith in Lesson 9 is precious to us weaklings. It is the natural result of nervous tension and great effort, and solitude and repose are its best cure. But more than these are needed. Staggering faith can pray, and, though the prayer is more complaint than prayer, still it is answered. If the young bird, even with a broken wing, flutters to the mother, it is taken to its warm shelter. Elijah all but throws up his mission, declares that the limits of endurance and capacity have been reached, gloomily underrates his success, and his only petition is to die, which he does not really desire, as his flight from Jezebel's threat showed. But God reads the meaning of wild words, and because "what time" Elijah was "afraid" he "trusted in" God, sleep that soothes the over-excited nerves comes, and he wakes at the angels touch to find tokens of God's care in the cake and cruse. That "meat" gave more than bodily strength; the love which it betokened strengthened his spirit for his long march. Our daily blessings should do the same for us.

In Lesson 10, Elijah stands where Moses stood, and the revelation he received is meant to recall that to the Lawgiver. It imprints on the prophet's mind the great truths that the highest revelation of God is not in the force of nature, but in intelligent speech, and the other, that is not in violent energies that overthrow and consume, but in gentleness. It did not rebuke Elijah's methods, for these had been dictated to him by God, but it showed him that he and the order to which he belonged were but forerunners of the perfect revelation and Revealer, and therefore taught him to look