

SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

## The Quiet Hour

YOUNG  
PEOPLE

## JESUS AND THE SABBATH.

By Professor James Stalker, D.D.

In the two foregoing lessons we have seen a storm of doubt and opposition rising, and how far this had already proceeded may be learned by turning to the last verse of the present lesson, which tells of a council held among his enemies to destroy him. Coming events were casting their shadows before.

**The Accusation.**—The statement that the disciples were hungry when they began to pluck the ears of grain demands more attention than it has generally received. It is a deeply touching notice; because it suggests that, in following their Master, they may sometimes have endured even this privation. If we are at liberty to think so, it will put more meaning into the saying of the Judge, in the account of the Last Day in the twenty-fifth of Matthew, "I was an hungry." In Deuteronomy 23: 25 the plucking of ears in standing grain is expressly permitted; but we should not much admire the disciples for so doing unless they had been really hungry. This is the point of the situation, and ought to be held fast in interpreting the passage. In one of the rabbinical books there are mentioned no fewer than nine-and-thirty kinds of works forbidden on the Sabbath; and under each of these there are many fanciful varieties. According to this authority, it would appear, the plucking of the ears would be reckoned a kind of cutting and the rubbing of them a kind of threshing.

**A Fourfold Defense.**—The name of the Devil signifies the Accuser; and it was devil's-work these accusers of the disciples were doing; but, as in the wilderness Jesus encountered the Tempter with a quiver well filled with arrows, so did he now meet these accusers with a manifold defense; and it was, as was usual with him, chiefly drawn from the Word of God. One of the great advantages of knowing the Scripture thoroughly and being able to quote it by heart is that the mind is armed with arguments which can be produced when they are needed to discomfit the enemies of God and of the truth.

The first argument of Jesus was what David did and they that were with him—leader and followers in that ancient case bearing a striking resemblance to Master and disciples in this one. Some think it can be made out from this account in 1 Samuel 21 that what David did happened also on a Sabbath; but that is not the point; the point is that sacred law broke down before the claims of necessity and mercy.

The second argument does turn on a breach of the Sabbath; priests in the temple had far more to do on that day than on ordinary days, the sacrifices being doubled; just as ministers have their hardest work on Sunday and require a rest-day on Monday. So little do people perceive the facts under their very eyes that the hearers of Jesus had probably never noted this exception to their hard-and-fast rules.

The third argument is still drawn from the Old Testament, from one part of which to another Jesus moves with such easy sovereignty. The scribes no doubt thought they knew the Scriptures, of which they were the custodians; but Jesus delighted to show them that they were but superficial readers of the sacred text; so he says here, "If ye had known what this meaneth," as, higher up in this lesson, he says twice over, "Have ye not read?" That they should have missed the force of the present quotation was all the more reprehensible because he had cited the same passage against them already (see 9: 13).

The fourth argument is that the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. It has been confidently contended that "the Son of man" here can mean only "man"; but it is conceivable that Jesus should have said that man is Lord of the Sabbath? Man can be so only in his head and representative, the Son of man, who is the vindicator of all the rights of that humanity with

which he was pleased to identify himself. Here, in fact, we have a great example of what, in last lesson, we learned to call the Self-consciousness of Jesus. And we have another example of it in verse 6, where he declares, "In this place is one greater than the temple," the meaning being that it, in serving the temple, the priests were free to do as they did, much more were the disciples free to do as they had done in serving him.

**One Arrow More.**—Jesus showed that his quiver of arguments was not yet exhausted, when, on another occasion, his enemies returned to the charge. This was in a synagogue; the initiative is taken by the Pharisees, who, although beaten already in the contest, wished to renew it. But they gained nothing by their zeal; for, as on the former occasion he confuted them out of the Scriptures, so now he directed against them the shafts of common sense and mother-wit, which he knew equal to well how to wield. The strength of Jesus as a teacher lay in the appeal to nature; the Pharisees had wandered away not only from the true sense of Scripture but from the most obvious dictates of reason; and Jesus could refute them by the witness of the common mind and heart. It is, indeed, said that some of the Rabbis would not allow even what is assumed here—that an animal might be dragged out of a pit on the Sabbath day, holding that it ought to be fed there till Monday. But let us hope, for the sake of human nature, that this is not true. Not only is there the force of logic in what Jesus added, "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" but this is one of his great words of eternal life.—S.S. Times.

## "AND HE CLOSED THE BOOK."

The narrative of the first return of Jesus to Nazareth, as given by St. Luke, reads perfectly as the impression and vivid recollection of an eyewitness.

On Sabbath morning, when he wends his way to the synagogue, the fact is recalled that this was his custom. When he stands up to read, and the Book is given to him, we see him unrolling the page until he "finds the place." When he has finished, again we see him close the roll, stretching forth his arm to hand it to the attendant, and then sitting down. We are made to feel the tense breathlessness of expectation, when "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him." And among other thoughts suggested is this, that in such an ordinary task as closing a book, the way of Jesus had about it something personal and memorable.

This is the privilege and reward of personality. There are personalities worn so thin and penurious that great things dwindle to their touch into something less than commonplaces. On the other hand, there are personalities so throbbing with gracious power that they transform ordinary tasks into heroic deeds. The miracles of Jesus are quite as remarkable in this form as they are in the usually denominated form. Why should the greatest history in the world pause to say that he who made the history stooped to take up little children in his arms, that he turned, when held by violent hands, and looked upon Peter, that he made as though he would have gone further one solemn eventide? Will not these impair the majesty of the incomparable life? By no means; rather do they partake of the essential majesty, as cloudlets drifting in dull grey across the sky gather splendor when they are caught in the light of a full moon. The personality of Jesus has impressed itself indelibly on every act of his life. Nor is there any feeling of its being done for effect; had anything he did conveyed an impression of show we

instinctively believe that it would of itself have dropped out of the history. Indeed there would have been no history like this to write. The commonplace has become unique, because of the unique life. He came among us, "trailing clouds of glory," which never lost their glory. He closed the book, as never man closed it before.

Great deeds are not great through effort and strain; they are only great, in reality, as they are the natural and mature fruit of personality. No man can suddenly cut himself away from his way of life and say: "What I now do is a noble deed." It may appear noble to the world's hasty judgment; but unless there has been a wonder of regeneration—if the man leaps out of meanness or out of mere commonplace, and after the violent effort falls back into it again—God does not count it noble. Should not one of the gospel messages of to-day be: "Cultivate personality?" In such a personality goodness would be normal, not exceptional; heroism would be ordinary, not romantic; love would be routine, not dramatic. Such culture would make self at last purely unselfish; the crucified "I" would become the Christ-risen "I."

We are constantly haunted and grieved by a sense of the unfinished—or, worse still, of the ill-finished—in our life. Sometimes, even when we have read the lesson for the day with some degree of satisfaction, we fall in closing the book. We are often so near being much better than we are. A little more, and how much greater would the great preacher be; how much more effective would the successful teacher be; how much more victorious would the Christian who makes some effort at self-control be. So many of our best virtues are only three-fourths virtues; or else a group of fair virtues is marred by some one uncorrected fault. The book, when closed, shows the uneven edges and even the torn pages.

This leads us to the door of grace. He who closed the book that Sabbath morning has no one else like him for helping us to close life's book well. He knows the soiled pages; but he can forgive. He has seen faith's torn page; but when he closes the book, he can set it right. He never passed out of his hand a stained volume. It was he who closed the book for a dying thief on Calvary. So we put the book of this dying year in his cleansing hands. No one need fear or be ashamed of the book which he has forgivingly taken up and closed. Life's last prayer and victory is this—that it is yielded to him, and he closes the book.—British Weekly.

## THE MASTER'S FACE.

No pictured likeness of my Lord have I;  
He carved no record of His Ministry  
On wood or stone.  
He left no sculptured tomb nor parchment dim,  
But trusted for all memory of Him  
Men's hearts alone.

Sometimes I long to see Him as of old  
Judea saw, and in my gaze to hold  
His face enshrined;  
Often, amid the world's tumultuous strife,  
Some slight memorial of His earlier life

I long to find.

Who sees the face but sees in part;  
Who reads  
The spirit which it hides sees all; he needs

No more. Thy grace—  
Thy life in my life: Lord, give Thou  
And then, in truth, I may forever see to me;

My Master's face.

—Southern Presbyterian.