

Devotional Service.

By REV. T. J. PAER, M.A.

JAN. 1.—THE ANGEL PRESENCE FOR THE NEW YEAR.

Ex. 23: 20-25.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., Dec. 26, *Elzevir guided*, Gen. 24: 1-26, 28-61.
Tues., Dec. 27, *Israel guided*, Gen. 28: 12-32, 32-33.
Wed., Dec. 28, *The Map guided*, Matt. 2: 1-12.
Thurs., Dec. 29, *Guided by the Spirit*, Isa. 63: 7-14.
Fri., Dec. 30, *Guided into the land*, Ps. 48: 9-14.
Sat., Dec. 31, *Guidance conditioned*, Isa. 58: 1-11.

"Waste no tears.

Upon the blotted record of lost years,
But turn the leaf and smile, oh, smile to see
The fair white pages that remain for thee.
Thou hast but to resolve and to God's whole
Great universe shall fortify thy soul."

The New Year lies before us. How shall we make the best of it? Stepping out upon a new path, we should have worthy resolves and high expectations. The past may have been marred, but the future may be fair. Indeed, instead of one path soliciting our attention at the opening of the year there are two—the one in which divine guidance is found, and the one in which there is no light from heaven. It is certain we cannot make the year 1899 what it ought to be unless we choose the path where is found Divine illumination. Selecting the other path, we grope in the darkness, and are sure to stumble and fall. Our topic presents to us the privilege of the Divine presence throughout the new, untired year, and throughout the future of our lives. What is needed, young people, is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul, and the application of heavenly principles to all earthly activities, and this new year and every year will be prosperous in the best meaning of the term.

1. THERE IS A DIVINE WAY. There is a Divine way for individuals, Joseph, Abraham, Daniel and David selected this path. The faithful people of God in both Old and New Testament times were guided in the Divine way, and multitudes of Christians since have been found walking therein. Those who seek Divine guidance may hope to be led in the right way. There is also a Divine way for nations, and those nations that seek to walk in the way of national uprightness and recognition of God's supremacy will attain greatness and perpetuity. There was such a way for the Israelites.

(a) *This way was through the wilderness.* Such are the conditions of our present existence. Every way to greatness, to glory, and to divinely prepared places is through the wilderness. As the old Latin adage puts it: "Per aspera ad astra"—through trials to glory. This is the law of nature as well as of grace.

(b) *This way was without enemies.* There are always seen and unseen forces opposing the onward and upward course of those who are striving after true nobility, and the accomplishment of the Divine purpose. The march of the Israelites was not a summer holiday. It no doubt appeared very often to them as stern duty. They did not pursue the journey because they felt like it, but because they must. We, too, must be prepared for privations. We shall make progress in this way,

not by following our feelings, but by being loyal to Gospel principle. In the face of all obstacles we must maintain a quiet faith, and a spirit of patient and heroic endurance.

(d) *This Divine way was contrary to mere human wisdom.* Notice the frequent complaints of the people of Israel. The Lord's way was not pleasing to them. It so often opposed their human inclinations and selfish purposes. God's way is not our way! Ours may appear pleasant at first, but it shall be bitter at the last. But God's way is often the reverse; and yet not exactly, for sweet is graciously mingled with the bitter when it is needed out to us. There is hunger, but there is manna. There is thirst, but there is clear water from the smitten rock. There is perplexity, but there is an angel to guide and protect.

2. THIS WAY LEADS TO DIVINELY PREPARED PLACES.—All is well that ends well, and this way is well for it brings to a prepared place. Many are willing to endure if they are certain of securing rich results. The miners and speculators in the Klondike region submit to privations and hardships with the prospect of attaining wealth. Yet, hopes are often blasted in utterly human pursuits; but if we faithfully fulfil divine conditions we shall come to divinely prepared places. Palestine was among the most fruitful and beautiful of all lands, the joy of all climes, the song of all countries, the goodly heritage of the host of nations. How eminently fitting that this lovely land should be selected as the representation of the reward of the long, wilderness journey. The hardships of the way ended in the peace and plenty of the Promised Land. And Epworth Leaguers, if we treat the divine path faithfully and persistently, we shall reach through the trials of the way, the Canaan of the realization of our hopes. We shall be attaining knowledge of the truth, strength of character, command of circumstances, increasing usefulness in service, growing power to resist the evil, and to do the right, the promised land of a conscience void of offence toward God and man. There is the heavenly Canaan as well as the earthly Canaan. What matters if it through the way be long and sometimes hard, we do not walk alone, and the place to which we are travelling is so beautiful and attractive; and we cannot fail to reach it if we obey divine directions.

3. THE TRAVELLERS IN THIS WAY ARE FAVORED WITH A DIVINE GUIDE.—We cannot tell whether this angel was a created angel or the second person in the Trinity—the angel that was with the church in the wilderness. Such is the opinion of Burrows, whose suggestions we have freely used. But we learn his greatness. The divine name was in him. The divine name is indicative of the divine character. The angel was appointed by infinite wisdom, and was competent to perform all his important offices. He knows all the way, understands all its dangers and difficulties, and is able both to guide and protect. Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Angel of the new covenant, is a perfect guide; He knows the way, for He walked it himself; He is acquainted with its sorrows and hardships; He has personally inspected the course, and with a full knowledge of it all. He assures the faithful traveller of ample directions and His personal presence.

4. CONTINUANCE IN THE WAY DEPENDS UPON THE FAITHFUL PURSUIT OF THE DIVINE WILL.—God promises seed-time and harvest, but we only expect harvest as the result of prepared soil and planted seed. We must observe certain conditions, if we wish to continue in the way. To begin is not enough—we must press on to the end by patient continuance in well doing. Many of the ancient people did not enter the promised land, because they failed to recognize the will of God as their authority in all things. "Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread and thy water."—is a law and a promise that applies to all ages. We must obey the voice of the angel.

We must observe caution, obedience, self-restraint, and the entire destruction of all that has the remotest tendency to damage the moral nature. While other paths abound, let us remain in the one divine path. While voices innumerable sound in our ears, let us not fail to listen to the supreme voice that bids us keep His commands, but by so doing this bright new year, we shall lead our way to the tolling of the bell that shall—

"Ring in the valiant and the free,
The larger heart, the knickerdander;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be."

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

Ps. 48: 14; Jer. 3: 4; Ps. 25: 9; Ps. 32: 8; Ps. 73: 24; Ps. 112: 3; Isa. 58: 11; Lu. 1: 79; John 16: 13; John 14: 6; Lev. 18: 5; Pro. 3: 1; Isa. 1: 19; Matt. 7: 21; 1 Tim. 4: 8; Rev. 22: 14.

JAN. 8.—A PRECIOUS INVITATION.

Matt. 11: 25-30.

HOME READINGS.

CHRIST'S INVITATIONS.

Mon., Jan. 2, To the kingdom, Matt. 22: 1-10.
Tues., Jan. 3, To life, Matt. 7: 13, 14; John 5: 40.
Wed., Jan. 4, To follow Him, John 14: 18-25.
Thurs., Jan. 5, To serve Him, John 13: 14-20.
Fri., Jan. 6, To self-denial, Mark 8: 34-38.
Sat., Jan. 7, To an inheritance, Matt. 23: 34.

Here is an invitation for all the world. No one is excluded. Everyone may enjoy the blessings it offers except the one who deliberately and persistently refuses to respond. All classes, all sorts and conditions of men are included in the catalogue of those "that labor and are heavy laden." Some are thus affected in body, some in mind, and all in spirit, apart from the great burden Bearer, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

The preparation needed to take advantage of this divine offer is a realization of our condition as laboring and heavy laden; a realization of Christ as the only One who can impart rest; and a willingness to avail ourselves of the rest He so freely bestows.

"All the fitness He requirith
Is to feel our need of Him."

And what blessedness the result implies! "I will rest you." This is the literal illustration, which means more than "I will give you rest." It is not as if rest were a blessing Christ could bestow as a friend would make a present, which might be refused after the giver had gone. When Christ leaves the faithless follower His rest also leaves. Christ's rest is only possible to the believer when he possesses Christ's presence and is obeying Christ's precepts. Rest is not so much what Christ gives to us as what He is to us, and so He says, not "I will give you rest," but rather "I will rest you." It is, in one sense, the sublime rest to the soul when that soul is in harmony with the will of its Creator and Redeemer.

Do not imagine, young people, that this is the rest of inaction, neither that the thorns shall be converted into roses, nor that the trials of life shall be removed. It matters not in what circumstances men are, whether high or low—never shall the rest of Christ be found in ease and self-gratification; never, throughout eternity, will there be rest found in a life of freedom from duty; the paradise of the sluggard, where there is no exertion, the heaven of the coward where there is no difficulty to be opposed, is not the rest of Christ. The Redeemer gives rest by giving us the spirit and power to bear the burden. Now let us present an outline around which thoughts may be clustered:

1. TWO KINDS OF PERSONS INVITED.—We have already seen that these two classes include the whole of mankind. But view them in detail—they that labor and they that are heavy laden. These two expressions cover the active and passive sides of our need. The former refers to work which, by