

The Quiet Hour.

The Stoning of Stephen,

S. S. LESSON—March 2. Acts 7: 54 to 8: 2.
GOLDEN TEXT—Matt. 5: 44. Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

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

They were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth, v. 54. "Only that which is replaced is destroyed," says one of the characters in a widely read novel. These men were vainly striving to huddle out of sight and memory their cruel murder of the Holy One of God. But, as the murderer in the legend saw the blood cozing up through the floor to keep the tell-tale stain fresh in spite of all his efforts to wash it out, so they could not hide their awful sin. It tracked them down into their most secret places. They could silence preachers like Stephen but they could not stifle conscience. They could rid themselves of guilt only by replacing it with penitence. Repentance would have enabled them, not to forget their sin, but to look back on it without fear. Their anger robbed them of the peace they might have had. Do not be angry when conscience or a faithful friend rebukes you. Put away the evil thing and put in its place humble trust in Christ and you will find true peace.

But he . . . looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, v. 55. A sense of the presence of God is the secret of moral courage which is the highest kind of courage. It was Joseph's recognition of God's nearness that made him a hero. He was not afraid to tell of his brothers' misdeeds in spite of their threatenings, he found no difficulty in resisting his great temptation, he felt no trembling when he appeared before Pharaoh because he always realized that God was with him. The calmness of Elisha in Dothan, with the Syrian hosts encircling the city, the boldness of Daniel at the court of Darius, the self-possession of Paul during the shipwreck can all be traced back to the same source. The general who has strong reserves to bring up at the critical moment in the battle wins the victory. The man of faith always has God in reserve and so is not dismayed by any emergency.

Behold I see the heavens opened, v. 56. The heavens are always opened to the believing soul. The man of faith realizes that heaven is his true home—his fatherland. Plato taught that the soul comes into this world from a previous state of existence, and that it brings with it some memories of its former abode. The great pagan had caught some glimmerings of the truth that heaven is the true home of the soul.

They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, v. 57. We have no right to question the reality of a spiritual experience related by another because we have never enjoyed a similar experience. It is an obvious fact that some men are able to penetrate more deeply into the secrets of the physical world than others. A great mathematician can reason about the forces which play in the universe in such a way that very few can follow him. A great man of artistic temperament goes into ecstasies over a scene in which a less sensitive person sees nothing out of the common. We do not doubt that the things which the mathematician knows and the artist feels are really in nature though we may not perceive them.

We accept their testimony, partly because they have no reason to deceive us and partly because of the effect on them of their vision. Why should we doubt that Stephen here and that Saul afterwards saw the risen Saviour? They have no reason to deceive us, and the effect of the one vision was a heroic death and of the other a transformed life.

Calling upon the Lord (Rev. Ver.), v. 59. Stephen gives us the first recorded instance of prayer directly addressed to Christ. But this was beyond question the universal practice of the early church. In the address of Paul's first epistle to Corinth are the words: "With all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Early in the second century, one of the leading features of the new sect as it appeared to an intelligent pagan was that "they sang an hymn to Christ as God." Canon Liddon has shown that in the Liturgy of the Church of England there are 193 devotional addresses to Christ. From its very commencement the church has held that Christ is divine, and this doctrine has been the sheet anchor of its faith.

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge, v. 60. God's attitude to sinners is a willingness to forgive. If you refuse to forgive your fellow sinner you set yourself in opposition to God, and until you lay aside that opposition, there can be no forgiveness for you. There are two considerations which ought to make it easy for us to forgive those who do us wrong. One is that God, as in the case of Joseph, over-rides the wrongdoing of men for the good of His people and cause, and the other is that God, for the sake of Christ, has freely forgiven us.

By the Waters of Galilee

The wind is low in the oleanders,
Softly stirring the rosy sea;
Out from a hill a rill meanders
Down to the waters of Galilee.

A burning blazon of blue enamels
The rainless heaven that arches o'er;
And Druses drowsy by their crouching camels
Where the meadows dip to the shingly shore.

Crumbling walls that the hyssop clings to
Such is Magdala's glory now;
And the only ear that the cuckoo sings to
Is that of his mate on the carob bough.

The columned city that Herod fashioned,
That glistened white in the noonday blaze,
Naught is left of its past impassioned
Save ghosts that wander its squalid ways.

Never a sail nor a galley oaring
The shimmering reaches of liquid calm;
Only a watchful vulture soaring
Over the crest of a lonely palm.

But still the mountains, violet, vernal,
And the brooding vales where the shepherds
be,
And the sun, in its equipoise eternal,
Looking down upon Galilee.

And ever, to halo the desert places
By the spell of the girding silence bound,
The haunting thought of the face of faces,
Of Him through whom this is holy ground!
Clinton Scollard, in the Century.

The chief joy of heaven and earth are the same. Heaven's chief joy must be loving God and serving Him, and that chief joy of heaven will be the great happiness of earth as soon as we live the truly Christian life.

The Furnace of Trial.

BY THE REV. CORNELIUS WOELFKIN.

Heaven, with its incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, is a place of glory. Both entrance and possession there, we all desire. But the pathway by which it is reached is no easy one. We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God. No servant ever came to glory but through the crucible of manifold trials. Let us not think it strange, therefore, concerning the fiery trial that is to try us. God delights not in undesigned suffering. It is only because there is some need be that He says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

"Our God is a consuming fire." Therefore all that would walk in His fellowship and abide in His presence must endure the test of fire. All that is natural in man, together with its glory, is as the grass of the field and the flower thereof; it must wither and die. The natural man, with his faults and graces, is perishable. Only the new man in Christ abides forever. We are placed in the furnace for the burning of the old man. As the wax melteth in the fire, so our pride, envy, selfishness, wilfulness, stubbornness, etc., are designed to perish before trial. We are prone to insist upon having our own way; to resent resistance; to become sensitive to slights, and determined in the face of opposition. But for all this, we find ourselves overcome; and there is combustion among the inflammable emotions and passions of our nature. The process is painful but wholesome.

If we really belong to Christ, there is in us that which cannot be burned. The virtues of the hidden man shine out of the fire. Meekness, humility, endurance, faith, hope and love are only seen amid fiery trials. It is only when the fires burn away the outward and natural traits, that the inner and spiritual character is revealed. When the three Hebrew servants were cast into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, the fire consumed only their bonds; and they who were thrown in prisoners, walked about as free men amid the flame. It is only amid resistance, reproach, disappointment, etc., that we are set at liberty from the bond of selfwill.

We are ever ready to admit this as a true theory. But what we need is to welcome it amid experiences. Our character is tested and we go to pieces. Let us rejoice in the trial; it is threshing out the chaff. And with the loss of the perishable in the fire, we should be stimulated to develop those graces of submissive meekness, which cannot be burned. Our work also must undergo this test. All that is wood, hay and stubble, however beautiful and complimented, will burn. But the gold, silver and precious stone will be made lustrous in the trial of fire. God help us to welcome the trials here, that we be not eternal losers in the final day, "in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." "Be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."—Christian Intelligencer.

When shall we learn that the pursuit of holiness is simply the pursuit of Christ? When shall we substitute for the "it" of a fictitious aspiration the approach of a living friend? Sanctity is in character and not in moods; divinity is in our own plain, calm humanity, and in no mystic rapture of the soul.—Henry Drummond.