

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLEJESUS AT THE POOL OF BETH-
ESDA.*

By Rev. P. M. Macdonald, B.D.

A great multitude of impotent folk, v. 3. There is more fine weather than foul, and more health than sickness in the world. The world, however, has very many who are helpless, and the greater number of strong and well folk have not only reason to be thankful for health, but they ought also to feel a responsibility towards these sick ones. Rev. John Newton, the author of a number of the hymns in our Book of Praise, said he saw two heaps in life, a heap of misery, sorrow and suffering, that was far too large, and another heap of happiness, gladness and comfort that was too small. He made it the aim of his life to reduce the heap of misery and increase the heap of happiness. The still, sad music of humanity can be heard by sympathetic ears, and may be threaded with a note of hope by sympathetic hearts.

An infirmity thirty and eight years, v. 5. Some persons are burdened with an infirmity for a lifetime. Burdened? They might not all admit that. Paul had a sore infirmity, and when, after rational complaint about it and effort to get rid of it, he saw that it was to be his lifelong companion, he turned it into a matter for rejoicing; for he found that "tribulation worketh patience; patience, experience; and experience, hope," Rom. 5:3, 4. If we could imitate the bee, our world would be changed. The bee looks for some sweet in all kinds of flowers and weeds, and it is not disappointed even in the flower of the nettle. Beware of allowing your infirmity to get into your heart. It will make you discontented, unhappy, fretful. If you reserve that place for Christ, your infirmity will become a blessing.

Jesus saw him lie, v. 6. I stood in a crowded office, and tried to catch the voice of a friend over the telephone. But though I heard a sort of buzzing noise I could not distinguish one word. Men were talking, there was tramping of feet, rattling of chairs and a score of other distracting noises. I tried and tried again, but it was of no use. Just then a clerk came to my assistance, and placing the tube to his ear, he wrote down every word uttered at the other end of the line. So it is in our spiritual experiences.—Our friends cannot understand our heart longings nor know our sorrow. The noises of the world compete with our appeals, and the eye and ear are filled with other sounds than our entreaties. Just then Jesus comes, and He sees and hears and knows. Every burden, every pain, every want of every man is known to Him.

Will thou be made whole? v. 6. "Remember, men," said a mission worker, speaking once on these words, "it's not patched, but made whole." Jesus comes to us, not merely telling us and showing us by His perfect example, what we ought to be and do,—that would be like telling the flowers to grow in winter,—but He puts new hearts within us and new strength to obey and follow Him. It is like bringing the sunshine and showers of spring, so that the flowers cannot but grow.

Rise, take up thy bed, and walk, v. 8. Thirty-eight years of inability to rise said to him, "Sit still; you cannot rise." Christ calmly gave the opposite command, "Rise." There was a conflicting

of commands here. We are not strangers to such a clash. Self and sacrifice urge opposite courses. Joan of Arc heard conflicting commands before she donned the uniform of a soldier. Her father ordered her to stay at home, and said that before he would allow her to go to the battlefield, he would drown her. The voices of heaven, as she believed, commanded her to go. She put aside the obscurity and safety of home; but the struggle in that conflict of commands was perhaps her most difficult battle. When duty whispers low, "Thou must," it is magnificent to answer back, "I can and will."

The man was made whole, v. 9. A miracle is incapable of explanation. But it is not the only mystery. A very boastful and quarrelsome scoffer at religion once met a preacher on a country road, and began to rail against the way Christians believe what they cannot explain. When he had exhausted his vocabulary, the preacher asked him if he believed only what he could explain, and the scoffer said, "Yes, only what I can explain." They were standing beside a field where cattle and sheep and geese were feeding on the grass. "You believe that the grass which these creatures eat, clothes them with their covering?" said the preacher. "Why, yes," said the other. "Well, explain to me, if you please, why the grass produces hair on the ox, wool on the sheep, and feathers on the goose." "Why," said the scoffer, "you know,—oh, well,—that is a fact of life. I cannot explain it." "Well, my dear, sir," said the Christian, "forgiveness of sin is a fact of life, and it is a fact that God will forgive you and make you wise, if you ask Him." And the preacher left his defeated opponent gazing at the mystery of the grass.

LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

By Rev. James Ross, D.D.

Bed—Orientals are entirely ignorant of our elaborate preparations for sleeping. They roll themselves in their upper garment, and lie down on the ground almost anywhere and sleep soundly. This man's bed would be simply a rug or a rude mattress spread on the ground. In most good houses there is a divan, or raised seat, along the wall, which serves as a sitting place during the day and as a sleeping place at night. The rich have now a mattress stuffed with cotton or wool, with a sheet over it, and a thickly padded quilt over them. Sometimes the bed is a framework of palm sticks, a little over six feet in length and six or eight inches above the floor. These are found only in houses which have bedrooms separate from the ordinary living rooms, but in most homes the whole family sleep in the one room. In Egypt, there were couches of as elaborate workmanship as the most elegant lounges of the present day. The ancient Jews, like their modern representatives, never changed their dress on going to bed, but merely laid aside the upper garment and loosed the ligature round the waist. In the summer they slept almost naked. The bedstead of Og, King of Bashan (Deut. 3:11), was made for his size and of bars of iron, because he would have broken through bamboo slats.

As at the beginning, so now, the heavy handicap upon labor is sin. It is the weight of the labor problem. It is the spring of labor troubles.

The crossroads of all history—the center of human life as a whole—is the knoll outside of Jerusalem's old wall where stood a cross bearing the form of the Man who bore the sin of a race.

THE DIVINE SEARCH.

(By Professor John E. McFadyen, M.A.)

"Search me, O God, and try me." Was ever a bolder challenge than this? And is it not strange that the man who thus flings his life open to the scrutiny of the divine eyes is just the man who knew that God was besetting him behind and before, that He knew every word upon his tongue and every aspiration in his heart?

One way in which God searches men is by leading them to search themselves; and one reason why life is often empty and progress slow, is that the days have not been closed with searchings of heart. We will not take a few moments in the darkness and the silence to look the day's work honestly in the face and humbly learn its failures and falls. It is too fearful a thing, perhaps, to be in our own company in the dark, and we would rather plunge from the distractions of the day into the blessed repose of the night, without facing ourselves.

But if we have never faced ourselves, how shall we hope to face our Judge? One day the door will swing open, and we shall have to enter, and look with troubled eyes upon a Judge whom no money can bribe and no excuse deceive. And shall we dash ourselves thoughtlessly upon that tremendous issue, without ever once having summoned its sternness before our imagination. Every day, above all, every night, brings us moments when we can, if we will, rehearse the final judgment; and he is a bold man who will face such an ordeal without rehearsal.

Let us live the day over again in imagination, listen again with sorrow to its hasty words, its unkind unbrotherly criticisms, watch again its opportunities neglected, its temptations unresisted; let us gaze with surprise and pain at its large and barren tracts, unlit by any thought of God. And, as the day passes sorrowfully, accusingly, before us, let us lift up our hearts to Almighty God, and ask Him to forgive the erring step, the broken vow, the cruel word, the unquenched passion, the frequent fall.

"Search me, and try me," said the Psalmist, and his boldness amazes us. But it no longer amazes us when we remember that he began with the confession, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me." He lived evermore in the conscious presence of God. It was not for him, as it would be for most of us, a new and terrible experience to find his life laid bare before the eyes of God. He did not fear those eyes; for he knew that they were ever upon him.

How the sense of the presence of God would uplift and purify life! Could we utter a thoughtless word about a brother, did we remember, "There is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether!" Could we harbor an impure imagination in our heart, if we remembered, "Thou understandest my thought afar off!" We shall be increasingly delivered from the sins that so easily beset us, and lifted up to the best of which we are capable, if all our activity is overshadowed by the thought of that gracious, austere, eternal Presence, from which there is no escape.

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The tree on Calvary has yielded richer fruit than all the orchards of the world.

God gives us trials that he may see how we will act under adversity.

*S.S. Lesson, February 23, 1908—John 5:1-9. Commit to memory vs. 8, 9. Study John 5:1-18. Golden Text—Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. Matthew 8:17.