

The Quiet Hour

(For Dominion Presbyterian.)

Psalms of Deliverance.*

By Rev. Prof. Jordan, D.D.

Here we have two songs of deliverance, the prevailing opinion being that they both refer to the deliverance from the exile in Babylon. Some, however, hold the view that the first (85) speaks of deliverance in general; while the second deals with the particular and great deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. It is not necessary for us now to spend time and strength over this shade of difference; we may spend a few quiet moments upon the thought of gratitude to God for His redeeming mercy. When we examine these songs we shall find prayers and expressions of lofty faith bound up with the manifestation of thankfulness. Indeed, the general tone of both songs may be summed up in these words: Gratitude for past blessings; prayer for present and future help; confidence in the divine mercy. Dr. MacLaren, who is a judicious and conservative critic as well as an able expositor, says of Psalm 85: The outstanding peculiarity of this psalm is its sudden transitions of feeling. Beginning with exuberant thanksgiving for restoration of the nation (1-3), it passes without intermediate gradations to complaints of God's continued wrath and entreaties for restoration, (4-7); and then as suddenly rises to joyous assurance of inward and outward blessings. The condition of the exiles returned from Babylon best corresponds to such conflicting emotions. The book of Nehemiah supplies precisely such a background as fits the psalm. Balthagen, a German expositor, thus briefly sums up Psalm 126: "The community has returned from Babylon; but the thankful remembrance of God's great deed stands in painful contrast to the sad state of things in the present. May God complete his work of restoration! He will do it; for tearful sowing brings forth joyful reaping. The contrast between the two halves of the psalm is similar to that in Psalm 85. From the elegiac tone of the first half, the second rises into the prayer of strong faith." These two quotations confirm what has been said and show the reality of these songs. They are not artificial songs. They come from the heart of struggling men and so they speak to us and cheer us in our present battle. Our thoughts concerning God's dealings are not built on mere speculation. He has done great things for us in the past, whereof we are glad; and He will be faithful and helpful in the future as in the past. Even the variety of mood in the poetry is a token of its truthfulness. As a picture is made of light and shadow, so life is mingled of sorrow and joy. The word of gratitude has scarcely formed itself into song before we are called to face again the stern, prosaic task of the present hour.

Psalm 85, 1-3—Words of thankful retrospect. The Lord has proved that he did not cast off his people forever. Their sorrow was chastisement from his fatherly hand; he has changed the course of their life and given them a new start; he has forgiven their iniquity and covered all their sin. This is spoken in gratitude, but that is not all; it is made the foundation for an earnest prayer. Though

*International S.S. lesson for October 29. Psalms 85 and 26. Golden text—"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Psalm 126:5. Read Jer. 31.

a great redemption has been wrought, life still has its burdens. Some take the great redemption to mean that there shall be no more toil and trouble. Even the Psalmist may have known something of that common human disappointment; but he conquers it and rises to the thought that He who has given the great deliverance will be an ever-present helper. So the prayer rises (47): "Turn us again, O God of our salvation; cause thine indignation toward us to cease." However great our deliverance has been in the past we still need to seek God's favor and help that we may have strength to meet the petty cares of our life and continue hopefully, our unceasing struggle. Then again, 8-11, the mood changes. We have, after a prayer rising out of a dark background of misery, a confident expectation of blessing, and a beautiful picture of Messianic life, when mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. Thus the song which begins with gratitude for the past touches the dark reality of the present and then reaches the loftiest height of God-inspired hope.

Psalm 126 is of similar tone and structure, but the figure is different. The wonder that the deliverance caused is dwelt upon: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Jacob, we were like those that dreamed." The thing was so good we could scarcely believe that it was true. Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing; we not only felt surprise and joy; we gave strong and hearty expression to it, so that the attention of others was attracted. "They said among the heathen, the Lord had done great things for them." Yes, that is true. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are full of thankful gladness. Thus the glad song goes, manifesting in a few lines, rich dramatic power until it also changes into a prayer and an expression of hope for the future. The present is a tearful sowing; but the future shall be a joyful reaping. As when the hot summer has dried up the brooks, God, through the autumn rains restores the streams of the South, so will he revive the life of His people, as those who sow under hard, oppressive circumstances, have by and by a successful reaping and rejoice before God with the joy of harvest. So shall it be with those who mourn over the day of small things, and patiently build the walls of their beloved city. This was a strong comforting word for those dark days of discouragement, but it is also a bright, beautiful promise for all times. He who sows with tears shall reap with joy; he who goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing shall surely come again, carrying his sheaves.

Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of Harvest-Home,
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come, to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of Harvest-home!

God is at work all the while, and God makes no mistakes. His thought is threading the centuries with a golden strand of redemptive purpose; His counsel is the outstanding fact that the inworking force of the world's multitudinous life.—New York Observer.

Great Emotions.

We live more than we know by great emotions. When we are stirred by these, the flats of life are obliterated. Our petty gains and losses count for naught. We are lifted out of littleness into the pure ether of God's ideals. Our growth is in noble instants when the selfish and the mean are consumed in passionate pity, admiration or gratitude. These moments are good for a nation as for an individual. The thrill that makes a whole people feel as one is the moment of greatest import. Chivalric souls still exist. They are in the next street, the next house, perhaps in our home. How glorious when they are discovered by the glow of opportunity! Then we see that the commonplace, the literal side of life is not too broad to exclude the poetry that lies inherent in all, and will come forth in the heat of great occasions. The race waits for the highest possible achievement in the realm of the soul, the reaffirmation of sublime facts. Heroism is one of these that in its complex nature defies analysis, but is recognized by the instant response of humanity. It throws itself without question into the gulf of necessity. No matter how costly the sacrifice, how noble the victim, it gives itself without stint or question and the race is lifted up toward its star. A new step is gained. There is something better to try in this humdrum world. So we would celebrate that generous ardor of youth that stops not to quibble or debate, but, being of the soldiers of God and hearing the word of command, goes forth to victory or to death, which is, perhaps, a higher victory.—Christian Register.

The years may come and go as they will if we only see the golden gates in the distance and on the far-away hilltops the cloud of witnesses who have guided us on our way and will take us by the hand when we wake from slumber. The heart need not beat like a muffled drum, as though we were sorry to leave these lower scenes; for if we are right-minded we shall keep step to the echoing music of a better world and be more and more glad as it grows louder because we are getting nearer to the everlasting home. Our religion makes us content to live, and ready at any time to exchange life for immortality.—Rev. George H. Hepworth.

Thanksgiving Hymn.

By John Hampden Gurney.

Lord of the Harvest, Thee we hail;
Thine ancient promise doth not fail;
The varying seasons haste then round,
With goodness all our years are crown'd;
Our thanks a pay
This holy day;
Oh let our hearts in tune be found!

If spring doth wake the song of mirth,
If summer warms the fruitful earth;
When winter sweeps the naked plain
Or autumn yields its ripen'd grain;

Still do we sing
To Thee, our King;

Through all their changes Thou dost reign.

But chiefly when Thy liberal hand
Scatters new plenty o'er the land,
When sounds of music fill the air
As homeward all their treasures bear;

We too will raise
Our hymn of praise,

For we Thy common bounties share.

Lord of the harvest! All is Thine!
The rains that fall the suns that shine,
The seed once hidden in the ground,
The skill that makes our fruits abundant!

New, every year,
Thy gifts appear;

New praises from our lips shall sound!