

The Quiet Hour

(For Dominion Presbyterian.)

Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem.*

By Rev. Prof. Jordan, D.D.

We see here the fulfilment of the exhortation to "Watch and Pray," in stirring times and under hard conditions. Nehemiah is a good specimen of an earnest patriot, a religious zealot and a practical statesman in one, a very good combination, and one that was needed in those days when Jerusalem was in a ruined condition and its inhabitants harassed by unfriendly neighbors. In the last lesson we saw Nehemiah preparing for his great work by earnest prayer; now we see him on the scene of action, engaged in a difficult and almost hopeless task. From his intelligence and perseverance in prayer we predict his perseverance in work, and we are not disappointed. The previous lesson was from the first chapter of the Book, which bears the name of Nehemiah, and which seems to be largely founded upon his memoirs, this section is taken from the fourth chapter. The two may be linked together by the following brief summary: The evil tidings from Jerusalem, Nehemiah's prayer, Nehemiah receives a royal commission to visit Jerusalem, the work of rebuilding the temple is undertaken, the distribution of the work, the opposition from without. It is the last item with which we have to deal. The next section shows that there are also great difficulties within the city; altogether it is a confused and perplexing situation. At the beginning of this chapter we are told that the enemy used a powerful weapon, namely, that of mockery; the toil of noble men who sought to build the wall was turned to ridicule. But this is met by the still more powerful weapon of prayer. The cry is wrung from the soul of the patriot: "Hear, O our God; for we are despised." How easily we are vexed and dismayed by ridicule, when bitter-tongued men turn to scorn the work that seems to us to be so important; fear and shame make us feel worthy. It is good then to commend ourselves to God, who sees the true spirit of our work. Heartened by prayer the people carried on the work of building the wall, for they had a mind to work. It was not forced work, slavish drudgery, but a labor of love for their church and

the land of their fathers. Then the motley crowd of enemies were angry, the steady determination and patient toil of those devoted workers kindled their fierce wrath. If they would effect their purpose and stop the work they must use something more violent than sarcastic speech. They conspired together to come and fight and cause confusion—an unholy conspiracy for a wicked purpose! The timid and faint-hearted felt that the work was heavy enough without the actual appearance of the scoffing foe before the walls. Then was the time to watch and pray. "But we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them." Which means we trusted in God and did not neglect our duty. There were fears within and fighting without; when the enemy was mustering in strong force there were some who began to complain that the work was hopeless. It is too much; we cannot do it, is their cry. At such a moment the presence of a good, God-sent leader is a great blessing. Then the Jews outside the wall sent their piteous appeals for help. Surely it was a very distressing situation. The church passed through many such dark days, but when the enemy has uttered the premature shout of triumph God has been near to help. Without a strong leader having great faith in God and in a righteous cause the case would have been hopeless. Three things are here emphasized: Organization, to arrange the forces in the best way so that all available strength may be given to working, and if need be to fighting. To plan so that there might be union to repel the attack at any given point, and that the strength of all might be used for the defence of each. This was the first work of wise leadership. Organization is important, but it is not all; there must be mechanical order, and within the order an inspiring spirit. This can only come from faith in God. "Be not afraid of them; remember the Lord which is great and terrible." This is the great fear which casts out base cowardly fear. When men can feel that on their side is the great and terrible God they are strong to face the foe. We cannot face the hardest battle of life unless we remember the Lord and have a vivid realization of His presence. The men in such an hour must have clearly before them the importance of the cause for which they are fighting. "Fight for your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." This was to them the greatest

of causes; it was their all—country and religion, everything that men count dear and that makes life worth living. In response to such an appeal men fight with desperate energy. There are for us two great lessons from such a story. We who have civil and religious liberty and live in peaceful surroundings need to be reminded that our privileges have come to us through the toil and tears of faithful men. True, these blessings are from God, but they do not drop down from the clear sky; they come through the storm and battle. Without great sacrifices on the part of those who held the truth as the dearest possession, we could not have had the truth which makes men strong and free. In our quiet hours let us remember the troublous times and the heroic conflicts to which we owe so much. Let us remember that in some form we must fight the same battle. We cannot live upon the memory of past victories; each generation has its own enemies to meet, its own battles to fight. There are still ill-disposed men, who conspire against the building of God's churches; aggressive work will still rouse opposition. When the church is praying, working and fighting, she must face scorn and violence. If we stir up little opposition it may be because we are sleepy and half-hearted. There is no need for bitter bigotry but there is even less need for weak compromise; the church to-day must give a clear testimony and speak with a strong voice against all that would sap the strength of society and weaken the work of noble men. If there are foes without and foes within we may still say: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble."

A Prayer.

By Rev. George Matheson, D.D.

The fetters Thou imposest, O Lord, are wings of freedom. There is no liberty like the liberty of being bound to go. When Thou layest upon me the sense of obligation, that moment Thou settest my spirit free. When Thou sayest that I must, my heart says, "I can." My strength is proportionate to the strength of those cords that bind me. I am never so unrestrained as when I am constrained by Thy love. Evermore, thou divine Spirit, guide me by this instinct of the right. Put round about my heart the cord of Thy captivating love, and draw me whither in my own light I would not go. Bind me to Thyself as Thou bindest the planets to the sun, that it may become the very law of my nature to be led by Thee. May I be content to know that goodness and mercy shall follow me, without waiting to see them in advance of me. Amen.

We cannot know what future honor may depend on the way we do the simplest, most common-place thing to-day. —J. R. Miller, D.D.

*International Sabbath School Lesson for November 12th.—Nehemiah iv., 7-18.

Golden Text—"Watch and pray."—Matthew xxiv, 4.