

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

GIDEON AND HIS THREE HUNDRED.*

(By Rev. Prof. MacKenzie, B.D.)

Get thee down unto the host, v. 9. No force can prevail against those for whom God fights. It is a stirring tale, the siege of Leyden in Holland, during the fierce persecutions of the Protestants in that country by Philip II. of Spain. The besiegers were pressing the town hard. William of Orange advised the cutting of the dykes to let in the sea, so that the brave Dutch sailors, known as the Sea Beggars, might come to the rescue. This work was begun, but the dykes took long to cut, and when the water at last began to flow slowly in, a violent wind swept it back to the sea. Within Leyden the supply of food was melting away. The Spaniards urged the citizens to surrender, offering them favorable terms. But the reply came from the brave defenders of the walls, "We have two arms, and when hunger forces us we will eat the last of our food with the other." At last, after four months, the sea reached the walls, and the gallant Sea Beggars were soon upon the foe. The Spaniards were put to flight, and Leyden was saved.

Go . . . hear what they say, vs. 10, 11. One who was himself skilled in the art of war, said that the best general is the one who knows what is going on behind a stone wall. If we would win the victory, we must know the opposition with which we have to reckon. A fierce conflict is on between the church of God and many kinds of evil. Some timid souls suppose that the forces of wickedness are so strong and united that they cannot be overcome. But the truth is that in every supporter of an evil cause there is a secret consciousness of weakness and a constant dread of defeat. The army of the Lord has but to go, boldly forward in His strength and its triumph is assured.

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again. The eternal years of God are hers; While error, wounded, writhes in pain, And dies among its worshippers."

A cake of barley bread . . . came unto the tent, and smote it, v. 13 (Rev. Ver.) The Sea Beggars who saved Leyden belonged to a confederacy whose emblem was the beggar's sack. Its first members were three hundred young nobles of Holland, who had presented a petition to the Regent Margaret, half sister to Philip II., asking that the king should be recommended to stop the persecutions. A nobleman amongst the Regent's counsellors said to her, "Madam, is Your Highness afraid of these beggars?" They accepted the name, multitudes joined their company, and the powerful and cruel king was made to feel their strength in the defence of civil and religious liberty. This is but one example, of which history furnishes many others, in which God has chosen instruments despised of men to accomplish His mighty purpose.

Gideon heard . . . worshipped . . . returned . . . and said, Arise, v. 15. David Livingstone begged the directors of the London Missionary Society, wherever they sent him, to be sure that it was "forward."

He was ambitious to spend his life, not in some missionary station already established, but to push the line of Christian missions in advance of points already held. Captain Allan Gardiner chose Tierra del Fuego as his mission field, just because the people

were so ferocious, the climate so trying, and the work so difficult, that no one else was likely to take it up. He and his companions were starved to death, but a second band took up their work. And when these were massacred by the natives, a third band went out, influenced simply by the fact that the case was apparently so desperate. How these noble examples—and they could be multiplied indefinitely from the history of missions—stir our blood, and nerve us for heroic living, whatever our appointed sphere may be!

Divided the three hundred men into companies, v. 16. Gideon's "plan of campaign" was a stroke of military genius, which is nothing else than an intelligent use of the opportunities of the moment. It would be well if Christian workers in the cause of Christ practiced the same common sense, the same wisdom, which men of the world display in their affairs. Dullness is not holiness, and tact and shrewdness, if consecrated to God, may find ample scope in Christian service.

Trumpets . . . pitchers . . . torches, v. 16 (Rev. Ver.). Much of the world's best work has been done with imperfect equipment. Michael Angelo carved his masterpiece, the statue of David, out of a block of marble which had been cast away as useless. Charles Darwin made his great experiments with the rudest and cheapest instruments. The main thing is that we go straight at our work with prudence, intelligence and enthusiasm. Then our efforts will count, however poor our tools may be.

Every man in his place, v. 21. It takes many colors to make up the white rays of the sun. It takes various sorts of food to build up the healthiest and strongest bodies. It takes many tones of harmonies to make an anthem. It takes a great variety of instruments to make an orchestra. So, men of different temperaments and abilities and capacities are required for the working out of God's purposes. Our place may be a very lowly one, but, if we fill it well, we shall have our share in the final success and triumph.

PRAYER.

Blessed Lord Jesus, teach us to pray. Lift us up so far out of ourselves that we shall enter into Thy very spirit of intercession, so that our prayer-life may be one with Thine—Thou on Thy throne, we on our knees. Forgive us for the sin of prayerlessness; for all the empty hours that might have been spent before Thy throne; for the worldly mind of thoughtlessness which has not remembered to pray; for disregard of Thy joy and our neighbor's need; and for all our unconcern for our own spirits' sensitiveness and prosperity. Forgive us, we plead, and teach us. Keep us close to Thee, our Master and Model, in Thy school of prayer. And may the lessons we therein learn be for the glory of Thy peerless Name, for the enrichment of our own hearts, and for the uplift of the whole world which Thou so dearly lovest. Amen.

Those who pray to the God of Pentecost receive an abundance of those blessings which they desire. They alone can pierce the clouds that encompass the valley of this present time, and survey on eagle's wings the promise of a distant dawn. Indeed, they are suffused at times with the first rays of the morning that shall be, and while subject as others to the chills and mists of earth, they are mysteriously warmed by heavenly fires. — Dorothea Price Hughes.

LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

(By Rev. James Ross, D. D.)

LAMPS AND PITCHERS—The lamps of the East are of clay burned in the kiln, and are oval, with one end tapering to a spout. The hollow for the oil is often covered, except a small hole for pouring it in, and a hole in the point of the spout for the wick, which is usually a small piece of rag. On the wide end is a handle. But the lamps here are probably torches of some inflammable material, which would only smoulder in the pitcher, but would burst into flame when swung round in the air. The pitchers were long, narrow jars for carrying water, but in this case were used for concealing the torches, just as the Syrian peasants still carry their lamps in these jars on a windy night. Gideon had discovered an unwelcome and panicky condition of his foes, and took his measures accordingly. We can scarcely conceive what a noise in the stillness of the night the sudden smashing of three hundred jars would make. And when this was instantly followed by the blazing forth of three hundred torches, and the fierce Hebrew war cry sounding from three sides at once, the effect must have been terrible. Once thrown into a panic, the host could not distinguish friend from foe in the darkness, and slaughtered one another.

COMPASSIONATE SOULS.

Those who can afford to suffer, to endure the sight of wretchedness, and to help the needy, are such as Wordsworth has described in "The Wanderer"—the simple-hearted and the strong, whose minds are kept "in a just equipoise of love;" who have known no "piteous revolutions," no "wild varieties of joy and grief"; who have never squandered their best powers, nor rendered themselves too poor for the sacred work of succour by spilling with unsteady hand the precious wine of life. There are also great compassionate souls who do not come under this category. While some turn away from the sight of grief with coward fears, and some, because their gifts lie in a different direction, there are many others who do so because, having suffered so much themselves, they have now the right, they think, to shut out all disagreeable sights, and to appropriate every pleasant thing which comes in their way. They were born and reared perhaps in grim poverty; and now, though for years the sun of prosperity has shone upon them, they cannot exorcise the cold from their bones; the sight of wretchedness in others, wretchedness from which they themselves have long since been removed, recalls memories too painful to be endured.

FEEDING THE MIND.

The Chinese have a saying: "If you have two loaves of bread sell one and buy a lily." It is not the body alone that needs to be fed. Mind, heart, and soul grow hungry, and many a time they are famishing when the larder is full. There are homes where the lilies are entirely crowded out by the loaves; where there is no room for beauty or enjoyment, or even for love, to grow, because of the mad scramble after wealth. Fewer loaves and more lilies—less of the rush after material good, and more time for the gracious and beautiful things God has placed within reach of us all—would make happier and nobler lives.

* S. S. Lesson, November 17, 1907. Judges 7: 9-23. Commit to Memory, vs. 17, 18. Read Judges chs. 6 to 8. Golden Text—Ye shall not fear them; for the Lord your God he shall fight for you. —Deuteronomy 3:22.