

the sneer of absolute power on his lip, great Persia all about him, and this cupbearer tiptoeing up to the king, a cup in his hand, and then speaking for the stubborn little city that has given the kings of the land so much trouble—Jerusalem.

Of what use will the venture be?

"I am going," says Nehemiah.

What if the king cry, "Nay?"

"I am going."

What if he scowl and shake his head, and in wrath give thee to his cruel guards?

"I am going."

But first Nehemiah goes to another King.

O, that other King!

What an empire he has! The shining stars are his bodyguard, the fiery sun, the silvered moon. What armies he can marshal! What weapons, what war chariots! The lightning is his sword, the thunder his chariot roll.

O, this other King!

And Nehemiah goes down before him. I see Nehemiah in sackcloth. I see him low upon the ground. I hear his sobs. I catch his pleas. He fasts. He begs. He holds on to the angel of supplication for weary hours. I hear him confessing Israel's sin and the sin of Nehemiah's fathers, and especially the sins of Nehemiah. And then he pleads the promises, to Moses, to all the Israel of God.

Will not this great King hear Nehemiah?

And now I see Nehemiah going before the earthly monarch, a cup in his hand, a prayer to God in his thoughts, a restful trust in his soul. What will Artaxerxes say as the cupbearer approaches him?

God speed thee, Nehemiah!

Good angels go with thee, and Gabriel and Michael be in thy bodyguard!

Make thy plea for Jerusalem, and all the time keep praying in thy heart to the One greater.

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

It is thoroughly in accord with all Western Asiatic custom that humiliation should be expressed by mourning and fasting. In the feast of Ramadan, which lasts a whole lunar month, the Moslems fast all day, and under even a broiling sun do not take a drop of water from sunrise to sunset. They often fast at night, however, with great hilarity. Little business is transacted. Jews everywhere observe fasting as a regular religious practice. Hindoo fakirs sometimes fast, or claim to fast, an incredibly long time, even being buried, as is affirmed by their friends, to prove that they receive no food for forty days or more. These claims, however, are not established beyond serious doubt, but they show the heathen idea of subduing the body, in order to increase spiritual communication and power.

But one thing cannot be paralleled in heathen countries, and that is the lofty conception of the spiritual character of sin and the devout penitential language of Nehemiah's prayer. Heathen nowhere show such apprehension of what sin is. With the heathen sacrifices are offered because the gods are hungry. Their sacrifices do not "pertain to the conscience;" do not bring any sense of pardon.

By Way of Illustration.

Verses 1-4. John Newton, on the wall of his study at Olney, just over his desk, had these words in very large letters, "Remember thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." This sympathy with his fellow bondmen in sin kept his zeal at a flaming pitch.

The Christlike character is like the *Æolian* harp, which gives music, bright or sad, according to the breeze which touches it; or like a lake which mirrors tree and rock, dark cloud and heaven's unchanging blue.—Cook.

"I prayed before the God of heaven." Prayer is good preparation for service. In our Canadian Parliament it was a Methodist Senator, the late John Macdonald, of Toronto, who succeeded in procuring the adoption of the observance of daily prayer. In the American Congress the chaplain is a blind Methodist preacher, and very touching it is to see him led to his place by a page and invoking God's blessing on the deliberations of the Assembly. An old proverb says, "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey." Luther used to say, "Bene orasse, bene laborasse." "To have prayed well is to have labored well." "I have much to do to-day," he would sometimes say, "I must therefore spend an hour in prayer." Prayer will clarify the intellect and lift up the heart, and better equip the soul for the discharge of life's duties.

Verses 6, 7. Confession. A German prince traveling through France visited the arsenal at Toulon, where the galleys were kept. The commandant offered to set at liberty any slave whom he selected. In conversing with the prisoners the prince met with universal complaints of the injustice of their confinement. At last he came to one man, who said, "My lord, I have been a wicked, desperate wretch. I have often deserved to be broken on the wheel, and it is a mercy that I am here." The prince procured his release.—Boves.

Verses 8-11. God redeems and cares for his own. The Russian Empress Alexandra, who died in 1860, instituted a system of releasing debtors from prison by paying their fines. In all such cases she employed a commissioner to see that the person so set free was provided with tools and work and