

(ch. 6 and 8-13). In his absence the people became careless, and on returning he found it necessary to institute many reforms (ch. 13: 7, etc.), amongst them a reformation of the Sabbath. His plans and methods are dealt with in this lesson. They reveal Nehemiah as a servant of God, a patriot, and a man of affairs.

*Shaw Oakville*

#### EXPOSITION

##### I. The Sabbath Broken, 15, 16.

V. 15. *In those days*; after his return from Persia to Jerusalem. *Saw I in Judah*; as he went about his duties as governor, Judah was the name given to the southern province of Palestine, of which Jerusalem was the capital. *Some treading wine-presses*. The grape gatherers trod the juice out of the grapes in a trough or press, and the juice ran into a wine vat. *And bringing in sheaves*. (Margin, Rev. Ver., "heaps of corn"); gathering their harvests and bringing them into the city. *Lading asses* (Rev. Ver., "lading asses therewith"). All kinds of heavy work were indulged in. *And all manner of burdens*; every kind of produce usually sold at Jerusalem. The desecration of the Sabbath was general. *On the Sabbath day*. "The temptation to desecrate the Sabbath in order to maintain amicable relations with Gentile traders [who knew no Sabbath] was a constant source of religious degeneracy among the Jews." (Camb. Bible.) *I testified against those who so profaned the Sabbath. In the day wherein they sold victuals*. The rebuke was prompt. With Nehemiah to decide was to act. He was a practical man.

V. 16. *Men of Tyre*. Traders from Tyre dwelt in Jerusalem. The Tyrians, like all the Phœnicians, were noted traders. *Which brought fish*; salted and dried and, perhaps, fresh, from the Mediterranean. Jerusalem had its "fish gate" (3: 3). Zidon, the neighboring city to Tyre, means the "fishery." *All manner of ware*. The articles of interchange between Tyre and Jerusalem were numerous. Tyre was particularly famous for a peculiarly splendid dye with which its cloths were colored (Ezek. 27: 7). *Sold unto the Children of Judah*; and in Jerusalem. The Tyrians had no Sabbath. The people of Judah and Jerusalem, through contamination of such neighbors, cast away the Sab-

bath that they had been taught of God to keep.

##### II. The Sabbath Breakers Rebuked, 17, 18.

V. 17. *I contended*; remonstrated and used his official authority. *With the nobles*; the higher classes of the people, who were most to blame, because better informed and more free to do as they pleased than the common people. *Profane the Sabbath*; by making it a common business day.

V. 18. *Did not your fathers thus?* The breaking of the Sabbath was ever a chief sin of God's rebellious people; and a prolific parent it always is of other sins. *And did not our God bring all this evil upon us?* The captivity, with all its attendant miseries; the fair city of their fathers in ruins and in a tyrant's hand. These evils were the direct outcome of the transgression of God's laws, of which the law of the Sabbath was a principal one. (Jer. 17: 27; Ezek. 20: 13.) For gracious promises to Sabbath keepers see Isa. 58: 13, 14. *Yet ye bring more wrath*. Not heeding the warning of the past, they continued to violate the Sabbath and thus to incur the displeasure of God, Rom. 1: 18.

##### III. The Sabbath Observed, 19-22.

V. 19. *The gates began to be dark*. These entrances were as deep as the walls were thick and thus grew dark at early dusk. The Sabbath began at sunset. *The gates*; the "doors" (Rev. Veg.). These were either small entrances in the gates, or the great gates themselves. *Charged*; the same word as "commanded" in the previous clause. *Till after the Sabbath*; till the next evening at sunset. *Some of my servants*; personal attendants of Nehemiah whom he could trust. *At the gates*, Rev. Ver. "Over the gates"; he set them to superintend the watch, that