

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

Returning From Captivity.*

This has been well called "The Second Exodus," for it marks a new epoch in the life of the Jewish people; it is the creation of Judaism, strictly so-called, and brings us to the last stage in the long preparation for the coming of the Christ. Almost two hundred years before the Northern Israelites who were taken captive were "lost," that is, scattered among foreign peoples and absorbed. Some to-day are spending their strength in the vain attempt to find these "Lost Ten Tribes;" that, however, is a mere fad, which has no support in solid history. A portion of the Hebrew race was lost, but the purpose and promise of God could not fall hence when the Jews were carried captive; it was a different case. Though there was so much that was impure in the nation's life, many had reached a higher stage of religious life and come to see more clearly the meaning of "Moses and the prophets." These people were taken to the great city of Babylon and formed a separate community. Cut off from their city and temple, they fell back upon their sacred books; they collected their literature and established what we would call Bible classes and prayer meetings, and there began a Bible influence which continues unto this day. Whatever controversies there may be about Moses, Ezra certainly went forth with the book of the law in his hand. That which came forth in the Second Exodus was more a church than a tribe or nation. To the historian of that day such a movement might seem small and insignificant, but we can see that it was of immense importance to the life of the world. We have already seen how Ezekiel, a prophet who resided among the captives, cheered and comforted them. We must remember also that in those days of sorrow Jeremiah's words began to bear fruit. The time came, though long after his death, when his promises of restoration and revival could be appropriated by a living faith. The "Second Isaiah" brings the great message of comfort, and mentions Cyrus by name as the Lord's Shepherd and Messiah, ordained to deliver this people. That was not an acceptable message to the more bigoted Jews; they would naturally have preferred a Messiah of their own race, but godly men had grace to accept a deliverance, which came in a manner different from their expectations. (1) It is here recognized as a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Thus the man who was most despised and rejected, speaks after he is dead, and is recognized as a true prophet. (2) It is recognized that a heathen king may act under a God-given impulse, and be, in a very true sense, a servant of God. That may be commonplace to us, but to the Jew it was a new revelation. To them the action of Cyrus was an acknowledgment of the God of the Jews as the true and living God. It would have been well in other cases if the zealots could have remembered this great truth, that all kings and empires are under the sway of heaven. (3) Though this was a political movement under the sanction of the Emperor, it was also a spir-

*Sunday-school Lesson for August 27th:—Ezra I, 1-11: Golden Text—"The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."—Psalm 126, 3.

itual movement stimulated by the spirit of God. There are two classes of people—those who were to go to build the house of God, and those who, while remaining, were to assist by their contributions. "Even all whose spirit God had stirred up to go up to build the house of God, which is in Jerusalem," "besides all which was willingly offered." The Second Exodus was therefore a more spiritual as well as a more ecclesiastical movement than the first—it was an election and selection in a deeper sense. The men who took part in this movement were stirred by patriotism and religion; they longed to worship God in the land of their fathers. Some who were well off in Babylon preferred to stay there and give money, but the leaders of this movement gave their souls; they sacrificed the material to the spiritual; they sought first the kingdom of God. Out of their effort, which seemed to the politicians of the day to be so small and mean, there came the highest blessing for the world, for they maintained the life, the testimony, and the temple until the Christ came. W. G. J.

In Me Ye Shall Have Peace.

Long days and nights upon this restless bed
Of daily, nightly weariness and pain!—
Yet Thou art here, my ever-gracious Lord,
Thy well-known voice speaks not to me in
vain

"In Me ye shall have peace!"

The darkness seemeth long, and even in the
light

No respite brings with it—no soothing rest
For this worn frame; yet in the midst of all
Thy love revives. Father, Thy will is best
"In Me ye shall have peace!"

Sleep cometh not, when most I seem to need
Its kindly balm. O Father, be to me
Better than sleep; and let these sleepless
hours

Be hours of blessed fellowship with Thee.
"In Me ye shall have peace!"

Not always seen the wisdom and the love;
And sometimes hard to be believed, when
pain

Wrestles with faith, and almost overcomes.
Yet even in conflict Thy sure words sus-
tain—
"In Me ye shall have peace!"

Father, the flesh is weak; fain would I rise
Above its weakness into things unseen.
Lift Thou me up; give me the open ear
To hear the voice that speaketh from
within—
"In Me ye shall have peace!"

Father, the hour is come; the hour when I
Shall with these fading eyes behold Thy
face,
And drink in all the fullness of Thy love.
Till then, oh speak to me Thy words of
grace—
"In Me ye shall have peace!"

The above lines were found among Dr. Horatius Bonar's papers after his death. It is believed they were the last he ever wrote.

You may take the greatest trouble, and, by turning it around, find joys on the other side.

The Nature of Divine Forgiveness.

By George Matheson, D.D.

"I have sinned against heaven. . . . Make me as one of thy hired servants. But the father said: 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him.'"—St. Luke xv. 18, 19 and 22.

There are no degrees in forgiveness. There are degrees in the holiness that follows forgiveness; but pardon must be perfect at its birth. Forgiveness restores each man to the place he had before he fell. If the prodigal had been a hired servant previous to his fall, he would have been made a hired servant again. There would have been no sting in that; it would have involved no stigma. But to make him a servant after he had been a son would have perpetuated the pain of memory. Nothing impedes my progress like the remembrance of a dark yesterday. When the page is already blotted I am apt to blot it more. I lose heart; I say: "It is already tarnished; what does it matter now!" If I am to get a fair start, it must be a bright start—a start with the ring and the robe. It will not help me that you lift me from the far country if you give me a place second to my former self. That second place is my yesterday, and I should walk by its darkness. It would dog my footsteps; it would never let me go. I should not feel that it was unworthy of me, below me. I should always be fingering my ticket-of-leave. I should never be able to soar for the remembrance of the Irons; memory would clip the wings of hope.

Therefore, O Father, I am glad that the robe has preceded my merits. I am glad Thou hast clothed me in beauty before I deserved it. I am glad Thy smile has not waited for my well-doing. It is only by Thy smile I ever shall do well; the white robe of Thy Christ alone will keep me pure. Give me the morning star—the star ere work begins. Give me the music and the dancing of Thy house in advance of my labors. Give me the light of Thy countenance when I am still untried, unproved. I would not seek to win Thy smile. I would receive it unwon; I would win by it. Let Thy favor outrun my day. Let Thy pardon come before my earning. Do not put me on hire. Do not take me on probation. Send out Thy light before all things; make me glad ere Thou hast made me good. When I am clothed in Thy white robe I shall seek the far-country no more.

A Secure Position.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God," says St. Paul to his converts. For it is not so much what a man puts into himself as what he puts himself into that make or unmake him. No sovereign remedies are ever given with a teaspoon. You can bury a man under a tiny mound or miniature hillock, but it needs a lofty mountain to lift him out of dyspepsia and nervous prostration into the perfect condition of a son of God. Religion is not a nauseous drug to be taken under compulsion of necessity and with a shudder of the spiritual nature, but a deep in-breathing of celestial vitality. What many a skeptic and doubter or misanthrope needs is not so much a proof text as a new point of view and a new atmosphere. One cannot fight malaria with a vial or a pill. What is needed is to get up into the heights and breathe ozone. The best way to kill sin is to cultivate piety. And so we come back to the Pauline prescription for the soul that has become conscious of its declining vitality: "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

The man who is dead to the world knows what it means to die; the process is not so easy that one can pass through it and not know what he is doing.