

"prayers and provender hinder no man's journey." After a season of prayer, one goes forth to his task with a clearer brain, a quieter heart, a loftier purpose, and with the strength that comes from the firm confidence that, having committed his way unto the Lord, the Lord will bring it to pass (Ps. 37:5).

It was, moreover, well done to begin the season of seeking God with a fast. There is no merit in doing without food. A man may starve himself and be none the more Godlike for it. But fasting was a sign of the penitent spirit, without which it is vain to seek God. It was also a reminder that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." (Deut. 8:3.) If we are to have anything from God, it can only be when we feel the need of God. A heart already full of self has no room for anything or any one else; and God does not force Himself into any man's heart or life.

*I was ashamed to require . . . soldiers . . . because we had spoken, v. 22.* A sample, this, of the tonic effect of taking a high stand. They had said to the king: "We are the servants of God; God will care for us." And, now, when the temptation is upon them to take lower ground, and ask the king for soldiers to defend them, the remembrance of their brave words upholds them. As self-respecting men, they must be consistent with themselves. As declared servants of the living God, they must allow no slur to be cast on Him. We may not always be able to live up to high ideals. Our poor little spirits may not always be large enough for the free play of the vaster motives; but we shall reach higher with lofty ideals than with lesser ones, and something of the spell of the larger motives will rest upon us even in our meanest hours.

*He was intreated of us, v. 23.* There is the throb of a swelling gratitude in this sentence. They trusted God. They ventured all on

their confidence that He would hear and help; and they were not disappointed. God loves to be trusted. He rejoices when we ask great things of Him. He gives beyond our asking. And when we get from Him, we become the steadier in our faith, and therefore the stronger for new tasks. A good Christian woman had marked her Bible in many places "T. P." "TRIED AND PROVED" she explained it; for the letters were put opposite the promises of the Word which she had herself tested. With every fresh "T. and P." her confidence would increase. Hers, with such discipline, might well soon become the faith that removes mountains. So shall ours.

*Then I separated twelve . . . and weighed unto them and said unto them . . . watch ye and keep, vs. 24, 25, 29.* Ezra did not neglect the temporalities. It was not enough that they had worshipped and that they were conscious of God's presence and favor. They must look sharply after the every-day work of God's kingdom, must see to the care and carriage of the silver and gold and vessels for God's house. Fervor in song or prayer or speech can never take the place of good business methods in the Lord's work. Those who do the financing of a congregation or of the great Schemes of the Church after a right fashion are serving God no less acceptably than those who preach and pray. Good financing makes preaching and praying easier.

*The hand of our God was upon us, v. 31.* A heavy hand it is for sinners. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. 10:31.) But a hand gracious, bountiful, tender, compassionate to those who fear Him. "I will turn mine hand upon the little ones," is His own assurance. (Zech. 13:7.) With God's hand upon him, the feeblest is strong, and the most timorous content.

#### TEACHING HINTS

Seventy-eight years had elapsed since Zerubbabel's first return to Jerusalem with his chosen band of loyal Jews. Recall some of the details of those stirring times. (See

lessons 9, 10, 11, 12, of last Quarter.) Zerubbabel, the prince, Jeshua, the priest, Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets, were chief figures in those days. There was great zeal, in