

Parish and Home.

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LIFE'S ANSWER.

I know not if the dark or bright
Shall be my lot;
If that wherein my hopes delight
Be best, or not.

It may be mine to drag for years
Toil's heavy chain;
Or day and night my meat be tears,
On bed of pain.

Dear faces may surround my hearth
With smiles and glee;
Or I may dwell alone, and mirth
Be strange to me.

My bark is wafted on the strand
By breath divine;
And on the helm there rests a hand
Other than mine.

One who was known in storms to sail
I have on board;
Above the raging of the gale
I hear my Lord.

He holds me, when the billows smite
I shall not fall.
If sharp, 'tis short; if long, 'tis light;
He tempers all.

Safe to the land, safe to the land—
The end is this;
And then with Him go hand in hand
Far into bliss.

—Dean of Canterbury.

For PARISH AND HOME.

FROM MALACHI TO JOHN THE BAPTIST.

BETWEEN the death of Malachi and the birth of John the Baptist there is comprehended a period of about four hundred years. These four centuries are often referred to in the writings of the day as four centuries of silence. That is because the Bible is silent as to their history. Old Testament history comes to an end with Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. It is continued, of course, to some extent, in those books known as the Apocrypha, but these

Protestantism rejects as uninspired, and their ejection from the canon of Scripture has led, it must be admitted, to their neglect even as literature and history. There is, therefore, to-day, owing to the silence of the Old Testament, a very profound ignorance of the four centuries of Jewish history immediately preceding the birth of Christ. This is greatly to be regretted, for a more important period of history, in many respects, does not exist. Modern Christianity centres in the four gospels or accounts of the life and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a Jew of Palestine, and He labored almost exclusively among His own people. The gospels have, therefore, a Jewish setting. The country, the people, the national life, and the customs forming their background, as it were, are Jewish. And to read the gospels intelligently we need to understand Jewish national life as it was in the days of Christ. But the key to this is in a knowledge of the history of Israel from the return from Babylon. The kingdom of David and Solomon was no more. With it perished the national life, as we know it in the Old Testament. This latter is, therefore, a very imperfect key to New Testament times. The Jews of the time of Christ, though in much the same, were yet a very different people, and the cause of the differences was the captivity and return, and the many historical events and changes of the four hundred years after.

I desire, therefore, in the hope of being truly helpful to the readers of PARISH AND HOME, to give, in a series of papers, a short outline of Jewish life and history from the return of the exiles to the birth of John the Baptist. I shall try to avoid, as far as possible, the dry bones of history—mere facts and dates—and make the history of those times a living thing, or, at all events, a useful thing. Bible-reading is a practice oftentimes more honored in the breach than in the observance, and the fault may sometimes lie in the lack of equipment for an intelligent appreciation of what is read, though in this day of pointed and inexpensive commentaries and helps the excuse is somewhat lame. Still, if a brief survey of this period of Jewish history may lead even a few to take a warmer and a more intelligent interest in the reading of the gospels, these papers will not have been written in vain.

Our period may, for convenience, be divided into three smaller periods, according to the ruling power in Palestine; for it must be remembered that, with one short but brilliant exception, the Jews were

never a free and independent people after the return from Babylon. These are the period of Persian rule, the period of Greek rule, and the period of Roman rule. Of the first I shall have little or nothing to say. Of all but the opening years nothing is known, and what is known of these opening years is gleaned from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The first return from Babylon was in 536 B.C., when by a decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, who had added Babylon to his dominions, certain of the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and city. About 40,000, besides some slaves, set out for Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, and under great difficulties built the second temple. These formed, as it were, the advance guard of the returning exiles. Seventy-five years after, in 459 B.C., came a second host of Jews under Ezra the scribe. The commission and purpose of Ezra was to restore the law to its old place and make provision for its thorough observation, and also to superintend the adornment of the temple and provide for its services and ministrations. Then, finally, in 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned under circumstances described in the opening chapters of the book of Nehemiah. His great purpose was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which had been overthrown in the final siege of Jerusalem. Ezra and Nehemiah worked together with might and main for the welfare of the infant colony. From the return of Zerubbabel to the invasion of Palestine by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C., the returned Israel grew and prospered under the mild and benign rule of Persia. The civil head was the governor appointed from Persia. The religious head was the high priest. In course of time the high priest became virtual ruler of the country and sole head of the nation, Persia exercising but a nominal protectorate. This temporal power of the high priest was the source of endless corruption in the office, led to its being coveted by the unworthiest of men, and obtained by the most infamous means, and was accountable for such types of the priestly character as Annas and Caiaphas, who sat in judgment on Christ. From 445 B.C. to 333 B.C., there is not an event of Jewish history recorded save the murder of a high priest. If the remark of Carlyle is true, that those nations are blessed that have no history, the Jews in Palestine were singularly blessed during that time. It was a long period of uneventful prosperity, soon to be broken by a long course of events that brought untold misery in their train.