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THE CRIMINALITY OF THE RAIL STRIKE

(Following is an electrically recorded report of remarks made by Dr. Shields, Sunday evening, August 27, 1950, before the sermon preached by Dr. Robert McCaul published elsewhere in this issue.)

IF IT be what it ought to be, the church should be the greatest moral force in the world. The Old Testament prophets were never silent in the presence of public evils. I do not believe the pulpit of the day should ever be silent when evil stalks boldly abroad.

At this hour the economy of the whole nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific is paralyzed, very largely by the whims and wills of a few Labour leaders. I think we shall all agree that regardless of the merits of the present dispute, whatever they may be, it ought to be made legally impossible for any group of men to paralyze the activities of the nation. Public carriers are given licenses. They are given special privileges, and they have a special obligation to serve the public interests, and perhaps there is scarcely a country to be found anywhere like our own, occupying the larger half of the North American Continent, which is so dependent upon their transportation systems, as we are.

The present railway strike has in it the potentialities, not only of great public injury, but even of death itself. Hospitals, various ministries to the sick, are all crippled everywhere. This, I say, ought never to be possible, and some action should be taken to make sure that it shall never be repeated.

I readily grant, as we shall all agree, that men have a right to put a price on their own labour. We are not slaves, but free men. They ought to have the right to refuse to sell their labour for a lower price than their appraisal of its value.

So far, so good; and I have no doubt that the organization of Labour throughout the world has been necessitated very largely by the merciless exploitation of the workingman, by conscienceless employers. The workers have a right to come together in their own defence; but they have no moral right to set up another government within a country, and that is exactly what has happened. It is stark, unmitigated sedition and insurrection, which ought never to be allowed.

Those who have provoked this strike should be regarded as criminals, vicious, dangerous criminals at large. Regardless of the merits of the strike itself, there must in this late day of human experience, be found some other way of settling differences between two groups that would stop short of the paralysis of a whole nation.

What is it all about? According to reports, the gist of it is this, that they will have forty-eight hours' pay for forty hours' work. They want fewer hours to work.

This passion for idleness is seizing the whole world. A forty hour week! Any good man, morally-minded, ought to be ashamed to admit that he works only forty hours. Remember the word of God enjoins us to work six days, and it is every bit as much a command of God to work diligently for six days as it is to rest on the seventh. I venture the assertion that no man in any walk of life has ever accomplished much in forty hours of labour in a week.

I am saying nothing about the pay. The principle is wrong, absolutely wrong, and it ought to be fought by everyone who has a clear view of the Scripture. They say, "What do you know about that? You are not a working-man." I should be ashamed of myself if I were not. I have known what it was to work six days a week, for ten hours a day,—sixty hours a week, and it did me good. I have worked at my own desk back here for as long as forty-eight hours at a time, without leaving for food or sleep.

I was asked one time to subscribe to *The Industrial Banner*, the Trades Union paper of that day. I said, "You would not have me." They said, "Why not?" "Because you would not let me work hours enough; and I could never get my work done in your hours."

The principle is radically wrong; and someone will have to rise up and face it. Men are not injured by working, providing they have proper working conditions. I know there are forms of industry where a man cannot work more than two hours at a time, then he must rest. There may be some who cannot work more than an hour at a time, and they must be paid for their rest periods, but, the period of duty should be more than five days a week. Our Lord Jesus said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" He knew nothing about eight hour days. I have yet to meet the man who has made a success of

any business who has confined his thought and activity to a paltry eight hours a day. You say "The man closes his store, or his office, and goes home." Yes, but he carries his business with him. He works into the small hours of the morning while his employees are perhaps enjoying a sweet sleep.

I am not saying anything against Trades Unions as such. Food is good: it is necessary to the nourishment of our bodies; but you can take enough food to kill you.

When some new drug is discovered, the task of pharmaceutical science is to discover the degree of tolerance in the human body for that new drug. How far shall we go? What shall be the dose? Up to a certain point it is a curative agency — beyond that, it is poison. And that principle holds in everything: there is a medium in all things. "Let your moderation be known to all men"; and there should be moderation among employers and employees. I venture to say — I don't know whether you will like this or not, but I cannot help it whether you do or not — it is the solemn duty for every Christian man who is responsible for his actions to God to refuse to be bullied, and bossed, and driven into unrighteous courses by any Trades Union in the world. I don't think we have any right to join anything, a church, or a lodge, or a labour union, or anything else, that would deprive us of the liberty before God, to do His will as we see it.

I want to make my own position perfectly clear. I think this whole procedure is a wicked thing. I think the leaders responsible for it should be held, by the public, in public estimation as being vicious, dangerous criminals at large. The laws of the land should be so amended as to make a repetition of this iniquity a criminal offence, punishable by heavy penalties. That deprives no one of liberty. The law is made for the transgressor, the transgressor of the law of God. The man who is too lazy to work more than five days a week does not deserve six days' pay.

I felt that under the circumstances I could not possibly be silent.

In the United States the Government took over all the railways this afternoon at four o'clock; and they did right. The Government of this country ought to take over all the railways, and operate them, until the law is so amended as to make a repetition of this wickedness impossible.

These men—I don't mean to say that as to motive they are culpable—if they do not see the possible danger in their action, then they are not fit to be the leaders of men. It might easily result in multiplied deaths, and enormous injury, and incalculable losses to the whole country. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

They had a meeting this afternoon, which broke up in an angry turmoil. Blame the negotiators, if you like. I repeat it ought not to be possible.

The issue is passed on to Parliament which will meet next Tuesday. I doubt not that the Labour interests of this country will circularize every member of Parliament, and threaten them with a big stick, if they dare to vote contrary to their will. The fact is, we have a government within a government, and for that reason I say it is sheer, unmitigated sedition, and incipient insurrection, that ought not to be possible.

"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice; lest the daughters of the uncircumcized triumph."

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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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I have not any doubt but that there is great rejoicing in Moscow, and in Communist China, and in North Korea, and wherever this Satanically-inspired movement is forcing its will upon the multitude. I have not the slightest doubt but that somewhere, whether they know it or not, behind this whole movement there is a Moscow-inspired instigator. If the prime instigator could be found and unmistakably identified, I would have a special plane chartered to fly as far as Moscow, and drop him there, I think without a parachute!

Now I have spoken plainly. I think you have an idea where I stand. If you Christian men have any part in this you ought to free yourself from all complicity in this wickedness and you ought to make your protest known, no matter what it costs. You say, "I am helpless"—no you are not helpless. No man is helpless who does the will of God. God will see to that. Let us work righteousness, no matter what it costs.

REDEEM THE TIME

We are told that wise men know exactly from time to time where their money is; they know what money they have, and they know where to find it or how to account for it. We should be as exact in measuring and accounting for our time as we are in respect to our money. Let us try to get at the religious use of time, and hold ourselves as the treasurers of the costliest jewel that can be committed to the care of creatures. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Man cometh forth as a flower and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time—literally, buying up the opportunity, buying up the chance—for the days are evil.

—JOSEPH PARKER.

True statesmanship consists of discovering which way God is going and getting the obstacles out the way.

—DR. GUNSAULUS.

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

The Supernatural Aspects of the Present World Crisis

A Sermon by Dr. Robert McCaul

"Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people and He hath stretched forth His hand against them . . . for all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched forth still."—Isaiah 5:25.

THOUGHTFUL people by common consent feel that we have come to a solemn hour in the course of civilization. Although history has been throughout a series of crises, the present seems to surpass all that have gone before. The question is upon almost every lip: Are we to have another world war? Is it credible that before we have had time or the capacity to compute the losses from the last, we are to see a more terrible conflict begin? Is a new carnage to overtake the nations while they are yet burying their dead from the recent holocaust? Must taxes again begin to soar over people already stooped from carrying several soldiers on their backs and whose children are being born, and will be born for generations, with a tax ball and chain about their feet which they will drag through life? What is this irresistible force that repeatedly draws men and nations toward self-destruction? With what hell broth does one section of the human race and then another become drunken and incited to deeds that might make the very jungles shudder? If it comes again what can we say but: "Oh judgment thou art fled to brutish beasts and men have lost their reason."

Natural Explanations Are No Explanation

Not one man in ten thousand upon the streets can give any satisfactory answer to the question: What is it all about? President Truman told the world over the radio a while ago about the origin of the trouble in Korea. We have heard substantially similar accounts from many other sources. They are doubtless fairly accurate, perhaps adequate accounts so far as the immediate cause is concerned. But they are all opinions and conclusions of the natural mind observing the sequence of events and seeking to find the cause of the trouble therein. But they are explanations that do not explain. They are like the answer of old Kaspar to his little grandson Peterkin who, asking the old man what the English and French fought about at the battle of Blenheim, could only assure little Peterkin that it was a famous victory, but what were the real causes of the war, or what they fought each other for he could not well make out. We are not implying that all war is causeless; that there is no such thing as a righteous cause that ought to be defended, and which it is better to defend and die than surrender and live, but the fact is that the real causes of war and certainly of this impending conflict lie too deep for detection by the unaided human mind, too deep unless we use the lens of Holy Writ in our search. It is neglect of, not to say disdain for that much disregarded but indispensable instrument for X-raying human events, namely the Bible, that has produced a pretended leadership to-day that can only be described as blind leaders of the blind. I have recently had the pleasure of spending some time at the famous Mayo Clinic where you

have abundant time to read a few thousand pages while waiting to be called for various tests. While there I read the very interesting and quite voluminous book called the Doctors Mayo, some 800 pages which, by the way, contain a lot of material useful for homiletical purposes, analogies and illustrations from the medical world that should help the preacher to see in clearer light the nature of sin's disease and its treatment. It was interesting, among a great many other things, to read about the struggle of the microscope and to a less extent the X-ray, to come into recognition and general use even by the medical profession. The original Mayo, father of the two famous surgeon sons, was among the first, at least in that part of the world, to see the value of the microscope. While others paid no attention to it or saw no particular value in it, the elder Mayo held a family council to consider mortgaging their home and did mortgage it to purchase one of the best microscopes that had been produced up to that time. When the microscope was followed by the X-ray a new day had dawned in the healing art. The area of guessing in the dark was greatly narrowed and the eye of the physician was able to see and look into parts of the human body never seen before except in autopsies too late to save the life of the patient. What would we think of the medical profession, or any part of it, that would now suspend the use of these and other such divinely provided aids to the healing art? It is unthinkable and yet in the vaunted and boasted name of progress—that is what most men would do in the healing of the nations. In the search for whence come wars and fighting, in the attempt to isolate the germ that infects and destroys the health of mankind, not only is the Bible a microscope and an X-ray revealing that which the natural eye does not see and which Paul says can't possibly see, but it stands ready to render the immense service of providing case histories, examples of how similar troubles have risen before, and all these cases accompanied with particulars as to how they were treated and how, when such treatment was followed, no cases were lost. There are men in that city of mercy who can detect disease at a glance because thousands of cases have passed before them and they have had ample opportunity to observe the effect of certain treatments and the mortality rate following. It is this endless seeking in the realm of the natural alone that is the bane of the present hour, this ceaseless Ahab-like search for water which only the offended heavens can supply and would forthwith supply if the nations or some of them as an example would turn from Baal unto God.

The Cause and Cure Can Be Found Only in the Supernatural

While we said at the outset that the present crisis surpasses all that have preceded it, it should be understood

that such is the case only as to degree and not as to kind. God has not left any generation since the fall void of precedents men should follow in a newly developing crisis. Case histories abound beyond computation. And much less has he left this generation without guiding examples from the past. Paul had the right view of Scripture affirming that the events which had happened to his own people Israel, that is—Old Testament history—"these things happened unto them for examples and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come." Here is the dictionary that tells the meaning, the real meaning of the words recently become current, here is the message from the seat of the disease telling us where to look for it, and here, bless God, is the panacea, the medicine divinely prescribed and exactly suited to the malady. Yet men seek for the solution in the heights above and in the depths beneath when all the time it is nigh them even in the mouth of prophet and apostle, they repeat the grand error which Elizabeth Barrett Browning ascribes to the historian Gibbon who seems to have had an inveterate prejudice against revealed religion and of whom the poetess writes:

Who followed Reason yet forgot her laws
And found all causes but the First Great Cause!

How different is it with Isaiah the great statesman-prophet who ever sought that First Great Cause in the affairs of his nation and of the world. He analyzes and interprets from the divine standpoint the affairs of his day and in doing so furnishes us with an example which contains imperishable wisdom. This fifth chapter of his prophecy furnishes us with principles of interpretation which provide the only satisfying explanation of the otherwise inexplicable condition of the strange world which in our early days we never expected to see, but in the midst of which we now are. Let us look for a moment at Isaiah's world and with the light he furnishes us, look again at our own. I promise you that, if you will study it and make it your own, you will walk away from this chapter possessed of more real wisdom than if you had listened to, heeded and inwardly digested every word that has been spoken in the assembly of the United Nations from its inception until now.

Isaiah's World

The chapter from which our text is taken was doubtless written after a long period of prosperity and peace under such good kings as Uzziah and Jotham in the main had been. These reigns had come at the end and were in a measure the culmination of a long series in which God had shown special favour to Judah, and as the prophet looked back, he reflected again with what a lavish hand Providence had showered blessings upon this favoured portion of the earth. So manifest and ceaseless has been the love of God that as the prophet contemplates it he bursts forth into parable and poetry. He sings of Judea as God's specially chosen vineyard selected on the slopes of a very fruitful hill bathed in the life-giving sunlight; he sees God as the owner of that vineyard removing the stones that would hinder cultivation—driving out the heathen that Israel may go in and possess it unhampered; how God in selecting the land had put the Arabian desert on one hand, the Mediterranean Sea upon another, and the Lebanon Mountains upon the other. Such was the fence that God put about his vineyard enabling the owners to boast that Jerusalem had such strong natural fortifications that it could be defended by cripples. Then, says Isaiah, God had sown it with the choicest vines; think

of the men whom He had given as nation builders—Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah—pleasant plants indeed. And God had built a tower in it which may suggest that would-be destroyers could be seen from afar and repelled; or that the owner, so confident that such care would produce fruit, would sit in his tower and complacently survey his past labours and the growing fruit later to be harvested. So sure was the owner that such pains would produce the best fruit in abundance that he had hewn out of the rock a wine press to receive the vintage. All this suggests no omission on the part of the owner of aught that should be done to make returns certain. But now comes that for which we have not been prepared and the very opposite of what we are led to expect—when the owner of the vineyard goes at the time of harvest to look for the grapes, behold what he finds in that carefully selected sunlit vineyard planted with such choice vines, after removal of all impediments to growth; this vineyard so carefully defended, on which so much had been expended and from which so much was expected, lo, the owner of the vineyard found not grapes but wild grapes. Little, insignificant, impudent, poisonous imitations of reality, mocking the owner and wringing from him the words, "What more could have been done in my vineyard which I have not done in it, wherefore when I looked for grapes brought it forth wild grapes?"

What does a farmer do with a farm which after long testing would produce no wheat but only thistles, no grain, only thorns and briars? He would not forever sink life and wealth and toil in the cultivation of that which, if it could, would poison its owner. He would do just what Isaiah says the owner of this vineyard decided to do, abandon it, remove the fence that in hopeful days had protected it, take away the hedge and allow wild beasts formerly kept at a distance to come in and roam about it, let it become common unprotected ground, let thorns and briars grow where grapes would not and, this is the point at which the application intended in the parable is disclosed, says the prophet, I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it; that meant that the owner of the vineyard Isaiah was sadly singing about to his contemporaries, was God Himself, Judea was the vineyard and the men thereof were or should have been the pleasant plants; and in this vineyard he had looked for grapes and had found only wild grapes. Competent Hebrew scholars tell us that the Hebrew words in this section have inimitable beauty and sing the sad refrain with cadences that haunt the heart and that the author makes skilful use of Hebrew words with almost entirely similar sound but exactly opposite meanings so that one has translated this portion thus: "I looked for equity and behold iniquity for right and behold riot." The fifth chapter sings again the song of the first:—I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me, the ox knoweth its owner and the ass his master's crib but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider. A vineyard that mocked its owner. If we dare to say it reverently, it is the song of the disappointed Deity and of a nation that knew not the day of its visitation. It is the history of privileged Israel in a flash, a flash that lights the whole landscape. The prophet is explaining why and justifying God for the successive calamities that were coming upon Israel. Wars, threatened invasions, loss of territory, earthquakes, anxious days, everything unstable, sense of security gone, all that blossomed being blighted and the very root going up in dust, the defenses of civilization dis-

solving; far distant nations moving for war and strangely energized therefor, as if man were suddenly placed in the midst of roaring lions, all about them being darkness and sorrow and as they looked toward the heavens they seemed black with anger. And why? "Misfortune," some would say, "hard luck," "bad times," "life is tough." No, says Isaiah, the heavens are angry and why should they not be so. This is the nemesis for the total drop in the standards of life, greed for the prizes of this world, drunkenness whose victims are so many that it has taken hell by surprise and the devil sees he has to make additions not originally reckoned on so terrible is the toll from strong drink, confusion of moral issues until there seemed to be no moral issues, good called evil and evil called good, bribes buying men on every hand, selling their souls for some human consideration as if a soul was valueless until sold or turned into gold, all summed up in the horrible phrase WILD GRAPES. When Isaiah would account for endless trouble in the nation, he found it in man's vast rebellion against the government of God.

Perversion of God's Gifts the Cause of the Present World Woe

If the foregoing be a true though partial interpretation of Isaiah's explanation of successive disasters of his days and the inability of his contemporaries to find a way out of their seemingly unending troubles, then we have the clue and the only clue to the meaning of the present world crisis. The troubles of the hour have a supernatural origin and can never be removed until that fact is recognized and acted upon. We have all the elements in human society to-day immensely aggravated by the increased light we enjoy that would once again account for the fact that God's judgments are abroad in the earth and on a scale worthy of their divine author. Isaiah saw in the successive calamities that were coming upon his people that while all apparent calamities are not to be so interpreted, some can only be interpreted as God being angry with His world, that He has stretched forth His hand against them and hath smitten them; that this alone accounts for the trembling earth and that in the continued ignoring or defying of these providences is to be found the explanation of continued disaster, for all THIS His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still; it is for this that the sea roars, the earth trembles and the heavens are black. A God-deserting and God-defying world accounts for angry heavens and angry heavens in turn account for a desolate and God-forsaken earth. Such at any rate is the message of Isaiah to the men of his day and in this we may see reflected or thrown into relief, or illuminated, clarified the real explanation of the interminable tangle of human life at the present hour.

This succession of strikes, disputes, wars, and all the rest of the heart-breaking experiences can be explained only in the language of the text: "Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people", and His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still; that is why the pressure is not lifted. That is why there is no surcease of these conditions. God has entered into judgment, and has undertaken to police the conditions that are getting out of hand; and because of the things going on in His garden. Therefore—therefore—therefore—when you see that word "therefore" in Scripture look at what goes before it and you will have the explanation of what comes after—because of these reasons is the anger of the Lord kindled against

His people. And His hand is stretched out against them still.

Sickening Secularity

We notice that one of the things that Isaiah calls attention to is that God has been provoked because of the excessive covetousness of man, expressing itself at that time in building up great estates, and taking by unjust means land from poor people, and displaying a spirit of covetousness that showed no concern for their fellowmen, for the welfare of the world, or for God Himself. The old enemy of covetousness! We are told that one out of every six verses in the Bible, is in some form of a warning against covetousness. Man's taking the blessings of God, and appropriating them to his own use, dismissing the sacred because it is annoying him with its high standards, dismissing the eternities, confining himself to time, making himself the centre of everything. Language is very precise here. Isaiah says these people want to be alone, and not only alone, but alone in the midst of the earth, themselves the centre of the universe, content to live in sickening secularity, while God is not in all their thoughts. Simply sucking out of the earth everything they can get for material ends, and returning no spiritual fruit. Perhaps that could very well be applied to a certain so-called branch of the Christian church, the biggest land-owner, I suppose, in Canada, and almost in any country, grabbing on every side all sorts of territory, great spaces outside their buildings, all tax-free; and aiming to get their hands upon everything they possibly can, until there is no place left on the earth for Protestantism. Also as Isaiah says not only to grab all they can but to be alone in the centre of the earth, in the very midst of it, to control the world, and do it by sending out trial balloons every once in a while, calling their man in Rome the chief of Christendom, in the hope that we will accept it as a recognized fact. If they called him the THIEF of Christendom it would be quite alright.

Drowned in Drink

The next thing that Isaiah speaks of here is the way in which the nation of his day went over to drink. George Adam Smith calls attention to the fact that we have here in this chapter two of the mightiest instincts of the human race, in the grabbing of real estate, the instinct to gather, and the drink habit, the instinct to squander—to gather, and to squander. He calls attention to the fact that when nations become rich, they nearly always turn to drink, to squander that which has come to them through the blessing of God.

People often say it is not the use of drink, but the abuse of it, that we ought to be careful about. God made it, therefore man ought to use it, within reason. There is an article, written by a very thoughtful man, who has a right to express his opinion on these things, who tells us about the laboratory of the human stomach, which, of course, is one of the most wonderful things that the human mind can conceive—how it does its work, how it takes bread, and flesh, and other things, and in that laboratory, transmutes them into bone, and muscle, and nerve, and makes thinking possible. He tells us that there is a certain point in the process of digestion where the heat of the body produces a certain state of fermentation, in other words manufactures, or is about to manufacture, alcohol, but that nature has been so made that just at the point where this fermentation would take place, and alcohol created, and sent coursing through the

body, the temperature of the body does not rise to that point except in the case of sickness. And just at the point where alcohol would be manufactured, and sent through the system, nature rises up and says, "Not that thing! That must not go through the body which God has created." So in the very constitution of man's nature, God has written His protest against this perversion. There is a proper place for commercial alcohol. But nature says that place is not in man's stomach; you must pervert it to use it as a beverage. As Shakespeare said, to put into a man's stomach that which will steal away his brains. The fact is the world to-night is all but drowned in it. Strong men defending this thing that God has put His curse upon, and that the nation is dying from! We sometimes hear attempts made to describe people drowning around Noah's ark—who with any imagination to-day cannot hear the gurgle in the throats, morally, of young men by the thousands, who are drowned in this thing that is perhaps Number One in the list of the perversions of the purpose of God taking a sacred gift, a vineyard, mark you, a garden, that beautiful thing of God, and perverting it into a brewery! Is there any reason why God should not be vexed? Is there any reason why God should look down upon this thing that does not shock many people, and not be moved? Is it any wonder that God is doing something in a world like this, that has snatched His gifts, and turned them against His kingdom, crushing young men with as much relentlessness as a trip-hammer would crush a diamond? breaking mothers' hearts, destroying life—it is no wonder that God should feel to-day something of what He felt in the days when Isaiah called attention to this great iniquity that was destroying his own nation.

Revolt Against Reform

Some people don't like temperance reformers! Isaiah is the most intense, the most violent of all in that class. He touches upon the subject in a way that you and I would never have thought of. He says when you give license to the drink traffic, Hell is taken by surprise, the devil himself gets results beyond his expectations, and has to put additions to the nether world because of the glut of spoil that comes tumbling in when you lift prohibitory restrictions. Yet some people will say, "Yes, but you cannot legislate people into the kingdom of God." Of course, no one ever thought you could. But who is so blind as not to see that evil can be restricted. Isaiah implies that where you have an unrestrained liquor traffic, you produce a race of men who regard not the word of the Lord, nor the operations of His hands. It is very significant that the era of reform, and I think the era of much great church building, disappeared from the other side of the line, as I know, about at the point where that great moral movement against liquor came to its rest and it does seem as if the spirit of God not only departed from the social organism at that time, but the very churches themselves have been bled into weakness because of the lack of this earnestness for reform that breathes from the pages of Isaiah. And in the face of such conditions, as Dr. Shields has just said, the Christian church can never be silent, for if it does not speak, from what quarter will protest ever come? Not as many people as formerly are angry at the liquor traffic but make no mistake God is, and is showing it.

How Are the Editors Fallen?

So Isaiah says do you wonder that God is roused up and that the heavens are angry? Why go searching Ahab-like for an explanation of the long drought when all you have to do is to look up at the heavens? The heavens are angry and rightly angry and the angry heavens are the explanation of the parched earth. And before there is any relief it must be adjusted on perpendicular lines; there must come some recognition of God and of His Christ. Take for instance something else that Isaiah speaks of in this chapter. The matter of calling evil good and good evil. We haven't time to dwell upon it to-night but how fashionable that has become in these days. To call good evil and evil good. That was a splendid article by Mr. Whitcombe in a recent issue of THE GOSPEL WITNESS, when he called attention to the attitude of one of the daily papers in Toronto on the matter of young men who from time to time are being imprisoned in this country because of preaching the gospel on the streets. *The Globe and Mail*, I think it was, called attention to the fact that it is not to be wondered at that these men should be imprisoned. This paper practically spoke of them as malicious nuisances that ought to be apprehended and put out of the way. A perfect example of what Isaiah was talking about here, calling good, evil, and evil, good. Putting themselves on the side of the powers of darkness. Moving against the representatives of the light. You have it on every hand. Oh, the phraseology to-day—expressive of moral confusion. The line between good and evil rubbed out—evil good, and good evil, upon every side. And then he speaks, too, of men, not drunkards themselves, but who throw their influence on the side of those who make drunkards. In the first part of the chapter he is talking about drunkards. In the second part of the chapter he is talking about men who are mighty to mingle strong drink. The great man—the great man in Isaiah's day—was the man who could mingle strong drinks, and marry music to revelry. Instruments intended to be used in the praise of God used to send forth the siren's song. There is a class of people far worse than the drunkards. The man who doesn't fall under the influence of it himself but who supports the business and lends his influence to it. I remember two years ago, I think it was, at Christmastime, somebody handed me a copy of *The Herald Tribune* as I was going into the pulpit one Sunday night and she said, "What do you think of this?" I looked at the advertisement, an entire page, on a night or two before Christmas, headed with the words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive", and recommending a certain brand of Calvert's, or something else, as one of the most fitting presents that could be given on Christmas and exceedingly suitable to fit in with the joy and merriment of the season. And I took the trouble to find out what that page cost and I was told, if I was rightly informed that they paid two thousand dollars for one issue to present that advertisement.

Now I suppose a man would have to have a good deal of moral backbone and fibre to dismiss somebody who brings in an advertisement like that. It is pretty easy for him to colour the editorial page so that he won't dismiss any such support. The likelihood is that we will never have an editor that is really an editor until these things can be divorced in some way or other. Until we can have a race of men with something of the

spirit of Isaiah that can stand up for a cause because it is right and who cannot be bought. Isaiah puts this along with it—bribery. And what a power it is in the world, until, like Elizabeth Browning reminds us, there comes a condition in which men are bribed for everything. They come finally to look upon their very souls as something not worth a thing until sold, no value until turned into gold. I think it was Spurgeon that said that if some men could put up their consciences for sale, if they could be sold as a commodity, there would be a lot of men advertising them that could say with perfect truth, "As good as new. I have never used it!" Bribed! And so Elizabeth Browning says, "Bribed to do this, and bribed to do that; sold for this, and sold for that. Bribed to tell the truth and bribed to gild a lie." The absence of manhood. When God looks down upon the earth to-night and sees what He does see, is it difficult to understand that we may be emerging into the condition in which He has decided to rise up and proceed in judgment against the civilization that has thus treated Him? Is it not perfectly understandable, in the light of Isaiah, to say that that word, "therefore", is to-night the explanation as it was in his day, "Because of these things the anger of the Lord is kindled against His people; His hand is upon them and is stretched out still." The climate doesn't change; the clouds return after the rain; we hope for some deliverance. We are not getting any deliverance; it seems to be getting darker and darker all the while. And what is the explanation of it? Well, Isaiah says, this is it: "God is finally moved to anger against His people. Therefore His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still." Why do conditions not change? Because He is no weak parent who starts to correct his children and then gets tired. He will follow through. Man cannot beat God though he thinks he can.

How the Angels Fell

This that we are setting forth as the explanation of the hour is set forth in the Bible as the explanation of the expulsion of Satan and the fall of man. Milton pictures Satan making his escape from the world of interminable darkness, given an opportunity to come back to the earth here newly created. Milton seems to hint that probably the human race was created to take the place of the angels who fell. And when thus created it produced envy in the bosom of Satan who asked for permission to leave the abode of darkness and come to the earth to work what ruin he could upon this newly constituted race, which, if unspoiled, would rise up step by step, until they attained the position of the archangels. Milton shows us Satan making his escape through the gates of Hell, guarded by sin and death flying through dizzy space until he finally sees the sun, newly created

orb of light for this part of God's universe, and as he gazes upon it, addresses it thus:

"Oh thou who with surpassing glory crowned,
 Lookest from the sole dominion like the god
 Of this new world: . . . to thee I call,
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
 O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,
 Till pride and worse ambition threw me down
 Warring in heaven against heaven's matchless King
 And wherefore, He deserved no such return
 Nor was His service hard.
 What could be less than to afford him praise,
 How due, yet all his good proved ill in me
 And wrought but malice . . .
 The debt immense of endless gratitude
 So burdensome, still paying, still to owe,
 Forgetful what from him I still received.
 Me miserable! which way shall I fly
 Infinite wrath and infinite despair.
 Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep,
 Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
 To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven."

It was the perversion of the purposes of God that accounted for the expulsion of Satan from the heavenly glory and his confinement to the abyss of darkness to dwell for ever in sullen rage against God, never to be given repentance again. Hence the warning of Scripture that since the angels kept not their first estate, therefore let man be careful lest he surrender his by entertaining the same spirit of defiance against the Creator.

The Message for the Hour

Now if the Bible gives us such an explanation for the fall of the angels, and for the fall of man, and for the drowning of violence and sin at the flood; and Isaiah, in turn, gives us a like explanation of the seemingly unending troubles of his time; of his sins with the ensuing calamities all accounted for in what God saw or didn't see in His garden, shall we take a hint from this as to the interpretation of like present-day events or shall we rely upon the stupid opinions of men who have nothing but a bovine stare for the supernatural? How solemnly impressive it is that Jesus puts His hand upon this very section of Isaiah to account for a terrible calamity that was to come upon the men of his generation, namely the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, an event of such magnitude that the average person has no comprehension of what took place at that time within the confines and environs of the Holy City. In explaining why this terrible experience was to fall upon the men of His generation, Jesus keeps strictly within the supernatural aspect of it all. If our Lord, as He looked upon the city of Jerusalem, saw something coming upon it so terrible that the contemplation obliterated for the time the consciousness of His own cross about to be endured and caused Him, as the language of the Evangelists makes plain, to break out with an exceeding bitter cry and the wail, "Oh Jerusalem! oh Jerusalem!", reminding the women who wept not to weep for Him but for themselves and for the misery that was about to come upon their children, something terrible in the air, something to arrive before that generation had fallen on sleep, if He gave as the explanation of it all that God was at long last abandoning His garden, taking away its fence and hedge and exposing it to an indescribable siege by its enemies, should

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The Gospel Witness

130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2 - Canada

it be thought a thing incredible that the gathering persistent perplexities and forebodings of this hour may also have a like supernatural aspect? He saw in His own rejection by the men of His day the finishing of the transgression which the prophet Daniel had predicted, He referred to it as the filling up of their fathers' iniquity; this was sin reaching its highest level in human history, the crashing crescendo of its hymn of hate, nailing Him to the cross Who came to be the Saviour of the world; this was the climax of all perversity as they said at the approach of Christ, "This is the heir, come let us kill Him." It was this that brought from the lips of the Son of God His farewell utterance as he left the temple: "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." This opened the way and called for a retribution that would in a measure correspond with the proportions of the crime. This is our Lord's explanation of the terrible destruction of the city of Jerusalem which though yet some forty years in the future, He saw already as an accomplished fact which brought forth from Him the bitter wailing cry.

Are we likely to be very far wrong then when we offer a like explanation for the seemingly unending chaos of this hour which is pointedly and adequately expressed in our text: "Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people, and He hath stretched forth His hand against them and hath smitten them. For all this His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still." It is scarcely conceivable that the forsaking of His altars, the abandoning of His worship and the widespread and in many sections total disregard of His claims could go on forever and He not enter into judgment. And when He enters into judgment man better not assume that God like a weak parent will begin to discipline His children but after awhile grow tired and give up the struggle. Milton makes Satan tremble at the thought: "What will not God do to advance His Son?" The wounds of the human race just now are self-inflicted caused by man in fatuous folly dashing himself against the throne of Righteousness.

The Call of the Hour

If these things be so, man's duty should be clear. If we are already Christians we should be careful to respond with unfeigned devotion to every new revelation He brings, every new claim He makes. Every Christian that in these days yields to the pressure of worldliness causes a new darkness to fall upon mankind while every Pauline "Lord what wilt thou have me to do" rolls back the anarchy of the night and advances the Kingdom of God. And for such as have never given Him recognition as their personal Saviour and as the one hope of the world, never in the history perhaps of the human race has such disregard appeared in so sinister a light. Let such an one read the consequences of rejecting Christ in the terms of present-day conditions. For want of individuals accepting Him, for want of making history HIS STORY, the weary ages come and go unblest and the world travails in bondage and pain even until now, for this the people that have long sat in darkness and in the shadow of death are yet deprived of light. For this cause must wars be waged and then waged again, the national energy turned to produce weapons of destruction, the national economy unbalanced, the career of young men terminated, hopeful youth marked for cannon fodder, for this cause must cities be laid flat and the toil of centuries be made fruitless, nations made

captive and continents darkened; for this must progress be arrested and civilization repeatedly hitched up again in the barbarism of the past. In the areas where Christ is rejected giant evils flourish and false religious systems deceive millions. In this atmosphere science becomes proud and conscienceless and threatens to destroy the whole human race. And all this but begins to tell the story. Language can suggest but can never fully set forth all that is involved in the acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. That is something that must wait to be revealed until that hour dawns when eternity comes rushing in on time. But most men will give a kind of dreamy unthinking assent to all this yet with some such remark as: "I believe in doing the best I can," they leave Christ unconfessed. Victories for Him or salvation for man are not won by silent secret admirers of His teaching if such there be who do not boldly come out on His side. They but mock His agony. It is they who confess Him before men whom He promises to confess before His Father in Heaven.

YOUR PASTOR AND MINE

A Quaint Bit of Philosophy

If he is young, he lacks experience; if his hair is gray, he is too old; if he has five or six children, he has too many; if he has none, he is setting a bad example.

If his wife sings in the choir she is being forward; if she does not, she is not interested in her husband's work.

If he speaks from notes, he has canned sermons and is dry; if he is extemporaneous, he is not deep.

If he spends too much time in his study, he neglects his people; if he visits, he is a gadabout.

If he is attentive to the poor, he is playing to the grandstand; if to the wealthy, he is trying to be an aristocrat.

If he suggests improvements for the church, he is a dictator; if he makes no suggestions, he is a figurehead.

If he uses too many illustrations, he neglects the Bible, if not enough, he is not clear.

If he condemns wrong, he is cranky; if he does not, he is a compromiser.

If he preaches an hour, he is windy; if less, he is lazy.

If he preaches the truth, he is offensive; if not, he is a hypocrite.

If he fails to please everybody, he is hurting the church; if he does please everybody, he has no convictions.

If he preaches tithing, he is a money-grabber; if he does not, he is failing to develop his people.

If he receives a large salary, he is mercenary; if a small salary, it proves he is not worth much.

If he preaches all the time, the people get tired of hearing one man; if he invites guest preachers, he is shirking responsibility.

So what! They say the preacher has an easy time.

—Selected.

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The Gospel Witness

130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2 - Canada

A PRAYER FOR EVERYBODY

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis St. Church, Toronto, on a Sunday Morning
(Stenographically Reported)

"O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid; O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."—Habakkuk 3:2.

"O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy"—particularly these words, "O Lord, revive thy work". I was minded to speak to you this morning upon the relation of faith and works; to endeavour to show you that where true faith is begotten in the soul by the Holy Spirit it always issues in godly conduct and Christlike character; that good works are but the fruit of faith. But as I sought assurance from the Lord that that was the message for the hour, my mind was, I believe, very definitely directed to the subject of revival, after the prayer meeting last night. I shall speak to you, therefore, of this ancient prayer this morning, "O Lord, revive thy work."

I.

I shall begin by saying that it is A PRAYER APPROPRIATE TO THE SAINTS OF GOD IN GENERAL. I think there is not one of us here this morning who does not need to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work." There will come a day when we shall not need to pray after this fashion; by-and-by we shall be entirely freed from sin,—not merely freed from any commission of sin, but freed from any tendency in that direction, freed, indeed, from all possibility of thinking a thought alien to the Spirit of God; some day we shall be delivered from "the old man", some day we shall have new bodies that will be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body; and, as we saw in our class this morning, we shall be made whole, we shall be complete in Him. We are complete potentially now, but then we shall be actually complete, and shall be without fault before the throne of God. We shall cease to be fault-finders: we shall be able to find no fault with anybody or anything around us — and no one will be able to find fault with us. What a great day that will be!—and best of all, the Lord Himself will find no fault with us, for we shall be before the throne of His absolute holiness, and even in the white light of His presence we shall be esteemed absolutely "without fault." What a great prospect that is which stretches out before the believer! Sometimes we sing,—

"There is a land mine eye hath seen
In visions of enraptured thought
So bright that all that spreads between
Is with its radiant glory fraught.

"A land upon whose blissful shore
There rests no shadow, falls no stain;
Where those who meet shall part no more,
And those long parted meet again."

What a great day that will be when we reach our desired haven, and find ourselves at last among "the spirits of just men made perfect"! And I have no doubt that so

far as the true believer is concerned, that is the ultimate destiny of everyone who has been born again; in whom God the Holy Ghost has begun a work, He will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ,—I say, that will be a great land, a great state, a great day, when we shall find ourselves without fault.

But that day is not to-day, and now we have need to pray, all of us, "O Lord, revive thy work." Sometimes the need of revival is apparent, is *outwardly apparent*. Even among the saints who have named the name of Christ there are many who seem sometimes to lose their appetite for spiritual things, for the means of grace, for all Christian effort; they fail in the performance of their Christian duty; and sometimes alas! even the Lord's own children fall into outward sin, they get into bad company, they are found walking in the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful.

I wonder if any of you young people have thus been overtaken, have thus been surprised into evil ways? You who have professed faith in Christ, have you been where you ought not to have been? Have words fallen from your lips that Christian lips ought never to utter? Have you been found seeking your delights where men of the world, and women of the world, find pleasure? Have you been openly denying your Lord? and are you saying this morning,—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word?"

If any of you have lost the joy of your salvation, the power to testify of Christ, I beg of you that you will take the verse of our text this morning and make it the earnest prayer of your heart for yourself, "O Lord, revive thy work."

Then *sometimes the need of revival is entirely known to God only*. There may be no outward lapse, there may be no open inconsistency, there may be no flagrant wrong-doing whatever, character and conduct may be as blameless as ever; and yet there may be a failing spiritual appetite notwithstanding, a want of communion with the Well-Beloved, a neglect of private prayer, a neglect of the study of the Word of God, a neglect of all the duties of personal soul-culture. In such case, although there may be no outward appearance of failure, my dear friends, that will come unless there be an inward revival. If any of you this morning have not seen the face of the Lord to-day, if any of you have lost sight of the Beloved, and have had to exclaim, "My beloved hath withdrawn himself and is gone", if you have not been on speaking terms with Jesus Christ this morning, will you begin right there in the pew, as I speak to you, and let

this prayer go up from your heart?—"O Lord, revive thy work; bring back to me my spiritual appetite, my passion for Christ, my love for the souls of men, my desire for His glory, my hunger and thirst after righteousness—bring it back! O Lord, revive thy work!"

But look now for a moment at *the import of this prayer*; for I have not time to pursue that thought further, but if any individual believer here this morning is aware that there is in his or her life a need for spiritual revival, if anyone is saying, How shall we pray? What shall we pray? How shall we get back again? — listen to this prophet's prayer, "O Lord, revive thy work." He does not pray, "Lord, help me to work", but *he prays that God Himself will begin to work again*. If you are a Christian, God has already begun to work in your heart, for "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." And if you have really been born again, if you are really a child of God, then God Who is the Creator of all worlds, has begun to do something in your heart and life. The prayer here is that God would revive *His* work, that He would resume His work in your soul. If love has become stagnant and stationary, if you have ceased to grow up into Christ in all things, if you have ceased to run with patience the race that is set before you, if you have come to a standstill in your Christian life, if the only progress you make at all is made with your lips, in outward profession, if there be no real fellowship with God, no real walk with Him, no real commerce with the skies, then it is because the Spirit of God has been grieved away. Is the wall left unfinished? Is the temple incomplete? Is the Holy Ghost not disciplining you, and teaching you, and searching you, and burning you by His blessed Word, leading you on to higher and nobler things? If that be so, it is because, in some measure, and for some reason, the Holy Spirit has been grieved until He has ceased to operate in your life; and the work of God in your heart is at a standstill, dwarfed, stunted, dishonouring to God, because the Spirit of God is not active in the life. Oh, if that be so, shall we not pray this simple prayer, "Come back to Thy temple, O Spirit of God; revive Thy work."

How does He work? *He always works through the Word*. The Word is the sword of the Spirit, and it is indeed "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The work of revival is always God's work. If we are to be what we ought to be, if love is to be rekindled in our hearts, if power is to be given us for service, if we are to follow on to know the Lord, if grace and peace are to be multiplied to us through the knowledge of God, and of Christ Jesus our Lord, it will be because God Himself is at work in our lives. He is working in you "both to will and to do of his good pleasure"—you remember that great word, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Salvation is God's free gift. The Word of God denies the right of proprietorship in everything, to every one of us, excepting in this: salvation is ours; there is one thing you may call your own. Your house, legally, may be yours, and yet death may take you from it; your wife, your children, may be yours, but God has a prior right in them. You may have other possessions of which you say, "This is

mine", and yet it is true that we brought nothing into this world — and it is certain we shall take nothing out. We came without property; we shall go away without property save this, that we shall have our own salvation. It is our estate, deeded to us by the last will and testament of our gracious Saviour; it is a farm of immeasurable dimensions, and the title to it is yours for ever. But you must work it out, you must cultivate it, you must develop it. Why? Because it is "God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good-pleasure".

It may be there are some here this morning who have ceased to work out their own salvation, because God has ceased to work in; the Spirit has been grieved, and we do well to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work; come back to the garden that is overgrown with weeds and briars, come back to the fields that are barren, to the life that is unfruitful. O Lord, revive thy work." He is the great Master, and only as He dwells within us continually shall we be fruitful to the praise and honour of His name.

Revival must always begin with prayer. Our text is a prayer for revival. You say, "I do not know where to begin." Begin here, "O Lord, revive thy work." This prophet said, "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid." May God help us to hear His voice this morning, and be afraid! And if it be so, it should be the first instinct of our hearts to cry, "O Lord, revive thy work," — just that. You need not make up your prayer, here is a prayer already made; and if we make it the prayer of our hearts this morning, and we pray with all sincerity, God will help us. "But I do not feel like praying" — that is why you ought to pray. "I have not prayed this morning, I have not prayed for a long time." Well, begin this morning. "But," you say, "I have so much to do before I am ready to pray." — You have nothing to do before you pray; you should pray that God will begin to do; and as God begins to do, He will revive His work, and memory will be quickened: you will think of duties neglected, of sins committed; memory will be on the alert, and you will find a procession of things going through your mind that will keep you busy for weeks and months to come. He will convict your conscience, purify your heart, strengthen your will; and you will find that the whole man will begin to throb with divine energy if you will but pray, "O Lord, revive thy work."

"Well, but," you say, "must I do nothing but pray?" Begin to pray, and God will look after the rest. Did you never hear a little child pray? — I have. It is not a very pleasant prayer, it cries until all the neighbours wonder what has happened to it. I heard a preacher once tell about one of his children. He had said to his wife, man-fashion, that he would look after the baby, so that she might go out for a while. She was not out very long before he had his hands entirely full — the child began to cry. He did everything he could; he almost tore the house to pieces trying to divert its attention, trying to engage its thoughts, trying to stop its crying. At last, in sheer desperation, he put the child down on the bed and rushed into a neighbour's house and said, "Come and help me. My wife has gone out, and I don't know what is the matter with the baby." The woman came in and said, "You poor stupid man—the child is hungry, just plain hungry." That child was praying, just crying out for what it needed; but he did not understand. But the neighbour mother understood just as soon as she came.

Did you ever get into a situation where you did not know how to pray, nor how to work? Did you ever get

to a place where you only knew that life was empty and barren, that there was an aching void this world could never fill—and then you began to cry? Never mind how you pray. This morning in the class they started to sing a long-metre hymn to a common-metre tune. Brother Penney slipped for once. He has all the tunes that were ever written in his mind, but just for once he played a common-metre tune to a long-metre hymn. And I said, "Never mind. Billy Bray once said, 'Anyone can sing a long-metre hymn to a long-metre tune, but it takes a real singer to sing a long-metre hymn to a common-metre tune,—just run a tuck in it.'" There are some people who imagine that God is very concerned about the phraseology of our prayers. We had a brother who used to come to our prayer meetings, who prayed for fifteen minutes at a time. Someone told me that he once saw him sitting in the public library going over volumes of public prayers—evidently compiling his prayer for the next prayer meeting. I had to write several letters to that brother telling him that we did not want such prayers. No, my friends, our God understands our need; and if you will only pray, I do not think it matters very much how you pray so long as you let your heart cry out to God, "O Lord, revive thy work—I do not know how it will come, I do not know where it will begin, but I cast myself upon the wisdom of God, upon the grace of God; only let God come back and begin His work again in me this morning."

Will you pray that prayer this morning,—every believer? Is anyone here this morning who says, "I do not need to pray that prayer"? Then let us all pray for him, because he needs ever so many people to pray for him! How little we have served the Lord, how imperfectly, how wretchedly we have failed of the possibilities of life! Do we not all need to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work"?

When shall we begin to pray—to-night at the six o'clock prayer meeting? That would be to wait too long. I will tell you what we can do, we will just be a little irregular and pause now for a few minutes' silent prayer in the midst of the sermon, that every one of us may with sincerity send up that cry to God, first for ourselves, "O Lord, revive thy work."

(After a few moments of silence)

Shall we bow: O Lord our God, hear our cry, the cry of men and women, and boys and girls, who do not know how to pray, who do not know what they need except that they need God. Come to us in all Thy fulness this morning, and revive Thy work in every heart. For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen.

II.

Then, further, this is A PRAYER THAT IS APPROPRIATE TO EVERY CHRISTIAN CHURCH—every church: "O Lord, revive thy work." We ought to begin to pray that prayer for this church. It would not be humility, it would be gross ingratitude were we to fail to recognize that God "hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Oh, He has wrought marvellously in this place, and we have seen the arm of the Lord made bare. Never shall I forget to my dying day, never shall I forget in the eternities beyond, what I saw happen in this church once. I will not tell you all the details of it—some of you older members remember, but the most of you have come into our fellowship since; but I saw the arm of the Lord made bare. I had read that scriptural phrase, but I did not

know what it meant. But it seemed to me that right on this side of the church I saw the bare arm of Omnipotence reach out and strike, until opposition crumbled, and the enemy was routed, and God was glorified. Notwithstanding, my brethren, there is no church in America, no church on this Continent, in greater danger than we are; for there is no church anywhere that the devil would like to disturb more than this. Oh, were we to fail in our testimony, how God would be dishonoured!

Blessed be His name, the voice of prayer is not silent! We had not quite as many last night as usual. It was a warm night, beside which I suppose many were preoccupied with visitors, while many more are still away on vacation; but if the room was not so crowded with people, it was full of the Divine Presence. The blessing of the Lord was there, and much prayer ascended for God's power to rest upon this service, and upon all His servants around the wide, wide world. I am glad the voice of prayer is not silent in our midst as a church; nor are conversions infrequent, week by week, and almost day by day, people are being saved. Notwithstanding, you and I ought, as members of this church, to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work." And I want to lay that upon your hearts this morning once again as our chief business, the business of prayer. Preaching is relatively unimportant—important in itself, but useless unless accompanied by divine power. It is not in human power to revive God's work: God has to do that; He only can quicken dead souls, and out of the valley that is full of bones, bring forth a marching army. That is God's work; and we are foolish to suppose that anyone but God can do it, or that anyone can be used in doing it if they live apart from God. Prayer is our main business: a church that has great intercessors may afford to have a very indifferent sort of preacher—I do not mean spiritually indifferent, but a poor preacher, such as this church undoubtedly has. It is not our learning, it is not our logic, it is not our intellectual powers, certainly not our eloquence, that God needs: what He needs is our hearts; and if we could only become, in a deeper sense than we ever have been as yet, a praying church that ceases not day nor night to cry unto God for a great spiritual awakening, there is nothing we could not do!

I said the voice of prayer has not ceased—but have any of you found your delight in the place of prayer diminishing? Are you less frequently found among those who gather together for prayer? (I am speaking particularly to the members of this church for the moment.) Oh, with these new converts that have come into our membership, we ought to have an ever-increasing number of intercessors. Are they increasing as they ought to increase? If not, shall we not pray that they may do so? Shall we not pray that every man and woman, every boy and girl, who comes into this church shall be one of God's remembrancers? I was thrilled this morning when I ran up to the Junior Department just for a minute, when I saw a little boy—I do not know how old he is—but I was rejoiced to see that great company of young people bowed in prayer while, by the Superintendent's request, I presume, this little lad of about twelve or thirteen years was leading the assembly in prayer, praying down God's blessing. And I said, "Praise the Lord for a boy that knows how to pray, and pray publicly." But, my dear friends, I say to every member of this church, you ought to be a cell in the church's lungs, you ought to be helping us to bring down the very atmosphere of heaven into this place.

A great many strangers come into this church, and I am always grateful when they say, as they often do, "Before we heard a hymn, before we heard a word from the pulpit, we have had to say, 'God is in this place.'" I do not care what is said about this preacher, or about this church, if people will only be compelled to say that the tabernacle of God is with men, and He does dwell with them. I do not desire that people should come here and say, "They have a great organization, a fine choir, a great many earnest people—I wish we had that where I go to church"; but if people will come into this church and say, "It was not the preacher, it was not the singing, it was not the organization: it was God Who blessed my soul, and if God can bless me there, there is no reason why He cannot bless me everywhere", I shall rejoice indeed. We sometimes sing,—

"For Thou within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humblest mind;
Such ever bring Thee where they come,
And going, take Thee to their home."

May this be true of everyone of us!

And so I exhort you, I beg of you, I beseech you, in Christ's name, to make this your prayer continually for this church, "O Lord, revive thy work." I have heard some of you singing,

"O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!"

Well, that would be fine if you were to use them all to sing the great Redeemer's praise—but we could use the one tongue we have more than we do. There is no use to pray for a thousand tongues if you are only using the one you have five per cent. of its possibilities for Christ. If you cannot have a thousand tongues use the one you have in a thousand ways—not every way, I do not mean that—I mean, to sing the great Redeemer's praise, to witness for Him, to tell to others what a dear Saviour you have found. So, as the summer is nearing its close and we are coming to another season—I am not going to ask you to make resolutions, either individually or as a church, I am not going to ask you to make some great effort in this or that direction: I want you to begin at the place where we only can begin effectively, at the Mercy seat, first of all for ourselves, and then for the church, "O Lord, revive thy work"; and when the revival really comes into your heart and mine, into the membership of this church, there will be work enough to do.

Why will people spend their time talking about ways and means when it is the power of God they need? Someone told me yesterday about a church that has a new pastor. It is a great thing to have a new pastor—new, very new! This particular church has had many new pastors within my knowledge of it—but they do not remain new very long! But they have a new pastor; and do you know what they have done? They have got a great electric sign outside the church so that everyone will know where it is. I have no objection to electric signs; but it is not the electricity which shines from the outside that will determine a church's success, but the divine power within. You may put all the signs you like outside, if the divine electricity does not energize the lives of the members, making every one of them an electric sign, proclaiming the power of the gospel to save, you might just as well shut your doors.

"O Lord, revive thy work." What is His work? His work is convicting sinners. There are not many people being convicted of sin just now, someone says. Well, my brother, get down on your knees and ask God to do it, for no one else can do it: it is not your work, it is not mine, it is not the deacons'; that is God's work, and if it is to be done we have got to go to Him and say, "Revive thy work". Only God can make all things new.

III.

Once more: This is A PRAYER APPROPRIATE TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN GENERAL—everywhere. I hope we shall not be so narrow and selfish as to pray only for our own work. I was so glad to have some brother last night—a very common thing—from another church, speak of their work, and when all the requests for prayer were in and presented before the Lord, it seemed to me that the earth was girdled, that the interests represented encircled the whole world. We ought to be praying for other churches. Someone came to me the other day telling me of a church that is nearly empty. I am sorry to hear of churches being empty; I wish all the houses of prayer were crowded to the doors; I wish I could see every church, of every name, in this city so filled with people that there was not room to contain them—I mean filled in response to the attraction of the presence of Jesus Christ. And if you know of any church where the work is declining, that ought to be cause for you to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work."

I am not censorious, I am not critical—I felt constrained to begin with a word of cheer, and that is why I read that last chapter of the Book. Let no one say that this preacher is a pessimist, I could not be for a moment. I am sure we are on the winning side, I am sure that Jesus Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of Christ. Jesus Christ shall win, He is bound to be triumphant; and I want to be there when He wins, I want to share in His glorious triumph. But, dear friends, we have fallen upon evil days. I can tell you of churches not a mile from where we meet to-day that have no prayer meetings,—think of it, a church without prayer!—just like that company that Ezekiel saw when bone came to his bone, and flesh to his flesh, and skin came upon them; but he said, "There was no breath in them", they were still dead after all the preaching, and it was not until the prophet cried, "Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live", that they stood up an exceeding great army. I do not care what eloquence you have in the pulpit, what wealth may be represented in the pew, or what social influence, if you please—the church that does not pray is a cumberer of the ground, it has no right to meet in the name of the Lord. Our business is to call down Heaven's power into human lives, yet here are churches all around us, some of which do not pray at all; and some of them, even in the best season, scarcely have a baker's dozen in a prayer meeting. Is there not reason to pray, "O Lord, revive thy work"?

And when men use the pulpit to deny and discredit this holy Word, when the doctrines of the gospel are scorned, and Jesus Christ is wounded in the house of His friends, is there not reason for us to pray that God will revive His work? Therefore, dear friends, in the face of a great task I call you to a recognition of a great Power

that is equal to the task: as we lay hold of God He can turn back the tide of unbelief.

I was reading recently *The Leaven of the Sadducees*, by Ernest Gordon, son of the late Dr. A. J. Gordon. If you have not read that book, get it and read it, especially if you are down-hearted. "Why," some of you will say, "that is a terrible book, it is a terrible indictment of Modernism." Yes, it is. It goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and shows us that conditions in New England, and all through the States, were as bad, or, if possible, worse than they are to-day, when infidelity was rampant, and carefully-planned organizations actually stole the houses of God and theological institutions, and prostituted them to the cause of Unitarianism. And yet, by God's grace, revival came at last. I believe that we are bound to win; that if we are in the last great apostasy, the Lord is on the way and He will be here soon, and in that case it will not be very long before we share in His glorious triumph; but that if we are not, we may still have a great and glorious world-sweeping revival. ("Hallelujah!") I do not see why not. Did you ever see God save a soul in this place? Oh, we have seen Him do it many, many times. If He can save one soul, He can save a hundred; and if a hundred, then a thousand; and if a thousand, a million. I was standing by Niagara only on Thursday last, and as I saw that great volume of water tumbling over there, I said, "That has been going on for ages and ages, it was doing that, perhaps a little further down the river, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea. What a picture of Infinity it is, with that great torrent pouring itself over there, with the reservoir of the Great Lakes behind it, and all along the banks power-houses being built!" Why have they built their power-houses there? Because they had to have that power. And I said, "It reminds me of the text, 'Our sufficiency is of God'. What a picture, no exhaustion at all!" He can revive His work in our hearts, and, if it pleases Him, in this church, and in all other churches, until once again we shall hear and see multitudes in the valley of decision, enquiring their way to Zion with their faces thitherward.

Is there an unconverted man here this morning? Will you pray, "O Lord, quicken this dead soul of mine"—that is all; simply pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner", and you will be saved. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." Call on Him, and you have God's word for it that you will be saved where you are sitting.

And if there are any of the Lord's children who have not prayed for a long time, pray now; and so let us have here ere we go home a foretaste of a great and glorious revival that shall be glorifying to our Lord.

Let us bow in prayer:

O Lord our God, if Thou hast spoken to us this morning—and we believe Thou hast and our hearts have answered—we pray that Thou wilt from this forward carry on Thy work. Suffer nothing to come into our lives that will interrupt the operation of the Spirit of God. We pray for any unconverted man or woman, that he or she may have grace ere we close this service to make confession of his faith before men. Use this service in Thine own way to bring honour to Thy great name. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

A man does not get grace till he comes down to the ground, till he sees he needs grace. When a man stoops to the dust and acknowledges that he needs mercy, then it is that the Lord will give him grace.—D. L. MOODY.

"BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF"

THIS, at first blush, is rather a strange saying. It would appear surely that morning is better than evening, that spring is better than autumn and winter, that youth is better than old age, and that the day is better than the night. Why should the end of a thing be better than the beginning? The beginning may not disclose the best that is to be, but at the end, at least one knows the worst, and there is nothing more to fear.

Our Lord cautioned His disciples that it was the part of wisdom, before beginning to build, to count the cost, so as to ensure the completion of the building, and if going to war, it would be prudent to find means accurately of appraising the probability of victory. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you."

There are tens of thousands of those who profess and call themselves Christians, of whom it could be said as it was said of some who called themselves disciples of Jesus in the days of His flesh — when He had expounded the spiritual character of His mission, and bade them labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life, from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Of how many people is it true that from a particular point of time their religious interest began to wane, until at last, perhaps, even their Christian profession was abandoned, because, by some means, they had been hindered from obeying the truth.

We have on our shelves not a few books written by men who, when they wrote the books, were sound Evangelical believers. But in later life they became infected with the virus of Modernism, and some of them ended their careers, having no testimony whatever to the saving power of Jesus Christ. We have known many professing Christians and church members who, at one time, were exceedingly zealous, and were, if anything, by their profession at least, ultra-spiritual; but we have seen them drift away, and at last, casting away their confidence, fall out of the Christian race.

We have, in years gone by, searched our own heart and record, fearing that something we had said, or done, might have given them just cause for stumbling but fuller investigation invariably proved that there was in their course of life a particular "that time"; there was a point of time at which they turned aside from the right path, and too often we have discovered that that turning point was when they realized something of the loftiness of the standards of the Christian gospel, something of the sacrificial cost of realizing the Biblical ideals of life — when all this became clear to them "from that time" they turned back, and walked no more with Him.

This Editor has been a preacher and pastor for a little over half a century. During that time we have made the acquaintance, not of hundreds, but of thousands of ministers. And, looking back over the years, in the perspective of history, one is amazed to recall the vast number who began well, but were soon hindered. We repeat what we have said before: that one thing which has challenged our interest and admiration of the great Spurgeon was that up to the time of his last utterance, he was always the same humble believer, wonder-struck by the riches of divine grace, as he was in his initial experience of salvation.

We can well recall older ministers who in the early days of our ministry, were wont rather to sneer at the intensity of our zeal, and, literally, to laugh at our refusal to compromise, saying, "Oh, yes; I was like that once myself but you will get over it in time, with longer experience; and you will learn that you have to be content in the Christian life with the second-best, or even something less."

We remember the first time we ventured, in an extra-church meeting at an Assembly of a Baptist Association, to submit a resolution calling upon the churches to abandon the practice of commercializing the gospel by resorting to garden parties, and bun feeds, turkey suppers, and bazaars, for the purpose of raising money for the church, as being dishonouring to the Lord, urging them to abide by the scriptural principle governing this matter, and, without compromise or wavering, to trust in God.

The resolution was defeated, as we knew it would be.

After the meeting the pastor of the largest church in the Association, not an old man, but a man in middle life, came to us and said, "You could easily have passed that resolution if you had added a few modifying adjectives." We said to him, "We did not expect the resolution to pass. We knew that we could effect its passage by such modification; but that would have compromised the principle at issue, and would have made the resolution perfectly innocuous".

Oh, those "modifying adjectives"! How many there are who trim their sails to catch any breeze that blows! and they are willing, sometimes, to go down to utter moral and spiritual defeat, if only they may appear to be successful.

When Samuel told Saul that because of disobedience the Lord had rent the kingdom of Israel from him, and had given it to another that was "better" than he, Saul said: "I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." Saul in his disobedience had cared nothing for the honour of the Lord; but he was anxious to retain his reputation before the elders of his people.

How often "the fear of man bringeth a snare", and how often spiritual decline may be accounted for by this text: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"!

We think, almost with tears, and certainly with great sorrow of heart of the spiritual decline we have noted in some whom we know. We think just now of one who was a born preacher. He had that something in his personality which commanded attention. He had an unusual gift, both of wit and humour. He always had a ready answer to every criticism, whether playfully or seriously passed, upon his utterances. He was most adroit in giving to every one a Roland for his Oliver. In the beginning of his ministry it seemed to us that all his gifts were laid at the feet of Jesus, his conquering Lord.

We never considered him a great preacher, because he was too ready and superficial ever to become a great student. He was more like the hare than the tortoise. His ready wit and dry humour carried him far; for though it is written that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, he early learned that the multitudes favour a laughing ministry more highly than that which would lead them to a house of mourning. Hence, he became popular, and apparently a very successful man. As we think of him now, as we first knew him, we cannot but believe that he might have become a really great preacher if he had applied himself to study as assiduously as he did to making merry, and to getting

money. He craved luxuries, whether he could pay for them or not. His success soon turned his head.

At length he found it impossible to get along with other ministers: he felt himself altogether too superior. He became demanding in respect to his remuneration, and put a value on his services out of all proportion to their intrinsic worth. Even severe illness did not modify either his conceit or his covetousness. Whether on this continent, or in Britain, or Australia, or New Zealand, he always had an eye to the favour of moneyed people; and he was like the horse leech that never says, "It is enough".

These ministerial vices, for vices they are, conceit, and covetousness, seemed completely to have mastered him, until he became a stranger to all loyalties in his determination to be first, and his insatiable hunger for mere things.

He has always been soundly orthodox in the evangelical sense. He has never been worldly in the sense of seeking worldly amusement. But as we have observed him, it has seemed to us that he is at the opposite pole from where he was at the beginning, and that to him this earth—

"Solid and stedfast seems to be.

And time has forgotten eternity."

As we recall what he was, and think of what he might have been, though he still rates himself as an eminently successful man, we look upon him and his record as a pathetic, ministerial tragedy.

We think of another example:

When we knew him first we thought of him as being one of the most selfless men we had ever known. He never impressed us as being a man of intellectual strength, but he was a fellow of tireless industry. He worked hard, while he was at it, and there appeared not to be a lazy bone in his body. He was a fair preacher, as a young man; and gave promise of increasing strength. And so he continued, as we supposed, to be a good workman. Whatever he did, he did well. Any task he undertook was thoroughly done. He was the sort of man in whom his elders could feel a certain pride and satisfaction, thinking of what a fine future lay before him.

Then he married, and in his marriage we rejoiced, and fondly anticipated a manifest reinforcement of all his powers. But it was not long before a change in his whole attitude toward life was discerned. After a while instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, as he seemed so thoroughly to do in the beginning, he seemed to be more especially concerned about the other things which our Lord taught us to leave in the Father's hands.

In a little while one had to await a decision from him; and when the decision was arrived at it was perfectly evident that it was not his: someone else was making up his mind; and that someone else had never had his spiritual zeal, was a stranger to what had seemed to be his passion for the word and work of Christ. And little by little we observed that disposition grow until ere many years had passed he bore no resemblance to the man whom we had known in the beginning. Completely trustworthy in the beginning, he became the opposite in later years. His prudence in practical things seemed completely to vanish; and he became, at length, apparently consumed with ambition; and as it grew upon him he became unscrupulous in respect to all interests but his own.

We have written him off. He is another who seems to us to have fallen out by the way.

The Apostle Paul looked upon life at last, perspective,

with not a little sorrow. His beloved Demas forsook him, "having loved this present world". John Mark could not keep up the pace, and Paul went on without him, while Mark found solace in the fellowship of Barnabas, a good but less strenuous workman. Paul and Barnabas did not cease to be friends, although in respect to Mark the contention had been very sharp between them, and they each went their separate ways.

It is one of the disappointments of the ministry that one has to learn to do without fellowships in which, at one time, he greatly rejoiced.

The reason for the forsaking of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the sixth chapter of John, because of the too spiritual character of His ministry, was, of course, not in our glorious Lord Himself, but in those who said: "This is an hard saying. Who can hear it?" When Demas and others forsook the Apostle Paul, it was not Paul's fault: it was because they demanded a lower level of life.

This afternoon as we dictate this article, a number of swimmers, we do not know how many, are engaged in the long grind involved in a fifteen-mile race. By radio we heard to-day that sixty had plunged into the water at the pistol's crack. It will be to-day as it has always been in that race, one will win the highest prize, and it may be two or three or four will come in after him. But though we know nothing about it, it is safe to predict that before the race is ended at least fifty of the contestants will have given up. Is it the fault of those who endured to the end that the others did not follow them? Everybody knows, of course, that it is because the others had not the necessary stamina to continue.

When Paul addressed the Galatians in the text we have quoted, he said: "This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you". It is not the voice of God which says: "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" In all probability the man has been subjected to some external persuasion which has turned him aside from the path of obedience, and he has failed to heed the apostolic exhortation: "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let us try to dismiss these disappointing experiences from our minds, or at least refuse to allow them to influence our course, and instead heed the admonition of the word of God:

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

If our future blessedness shall consist in being where He is and beholding His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory?—JOHN OWEN.

SPURGEON ON FRUITLESS SPECULATION

The following excerpt was sent to us by Dr. Robert Dubarry of Nimes, France.

More and more I am jealous lest any views upon prophecy, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of the men of God!

Your guess at the number of the beast, your Napoleonic speculations, your conjectures concerning a personal antichrist — forgive me, I count them but mere bones for dogs; while men are dying and hell is filling, it seems to me the veriest drivel to be muttering about an Armageddon at Sebastopol or Sadowa or Sedan, and peeping between the folded leaves of destiny to discover the fate of Germany.

Blessed are they who read and hear the words of the prophecy of the Revelation! But the like blessing has evidently not fallen on those who pretend to expound it. For generation after generation have been found in error by the mere lapse of time, and the present race will follow to the same inglorious sepulchre. I would sooner pluck one single brand from the burning than explain all mysteries.

—C. H. SPURGEON.

Bible School Lesson Outline

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COMPROMISE PROPOSED AND REJECTED

Lesson Text: Ezra 4:1-16.

Golden Text: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."—2 Timothy 3:12.

I. Compromise Rejected: verses 1-3.

Sooner or later every sinner will find out by experience that the way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15), and that it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the living God (Jer. 3:19). The children of Israel could not return at once to the full favour with God and the spiritual prosperity which they had lightly esteemed before the days of their captivity. Their leaders had instituted again the prescribed forms of sacrifice and worship, and had commenced to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3), thus endeavouring to bring order out of chaos, and desolation, but their progress toward settled religious life with God was beset with difficulty and opposition. It is easy to depart from God; the fleeing prophet finds a ship at hand to carry him away from the post of duty (Jon. 1:3). To return to the Lord is a different matter (Jon. 2:1-17). The one who would draw near to Him will find the road beset with mountains of difficulty and valleys of distress.

The faithful returning remnant, consisting mostly of members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Neh. 11:3, 4), were not the only inhabitants of the land. When the Assyrians deported, members of the ten tribes of Israel after the capture of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, they imported people of alien races to colonize the land (vv. 9, 10; 2 Kings 17:24). These intermarried with the few Israelites remaining in the land, producing a mixed race to be known later as the Samaritans. It was this mixed multitude who caused trouble to the true children of Israel (Exod. 12:37, 38; Num. 11:4; Neh. 13:3). The natural seed always persecutes the spiritual seed (Gal. 4:29), and in the church it is those professing to be Christians but remaining unsaved who hinder its progress.

These Samaritans requested permission to join the Jews in their building project. Presumably they implied that all would worship God together when the sacred edifice should

be completed. But the Jewish leaders perceived that such a union would by no means bring unity (2 Cor. 6:14-16), and would be far from desirable (2 Chron. 18:1; 19:2; 20:35-37). Although the Samaritans claimed that they worshipped Jehovah, they worshipped Him in their own way, mingling their idolatrous practices and magical rites with an outward conformity to some of the ceremonies prescribed by the law of Moses (2 Kings 17:24-41).

This subtle offer of assistance seems in reality an attempt to weaken the children of Israel by polluting the purity of their worship, and thus severing their connection with Jehovah, so that the Samaritans could control the people and the land.

Many a child of God has lost out by listening to such compromising offers on the part of nominal or worldly-minded Christians. In our day the same danger faces the evangelical churches and the evangelical denominations. The modern cry is, "Let us all get together. Why be so narrow?"

We should be as narrow as the word of God (Matt. 7:13, 14). Zerubbabel and Joshua were walking in obedience to the command of God when they rejected such a plea (Neh. 2:20). Separation from all that is contrary to the Lord's word is demanded, not conformity to the standards of men (Gen. 49:26; 1 Chron. 23:13; 2 Chron. 25:10, 11; 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1). The sane procedure, if disease germs are about, is to keep as far away from them as possible; he is a foolish man who sees what close contact he can make with evil without being contaminated (1 Cor. 15:33). Co-operation may seem like a magical password to big things, but it may be the beginning of a downfall (Exod. 23:2).

II. Opposition Encountered: verses 4-16.

The Samaritans acted like the proverbial dog in the manger. They said in effect: "You will not allow us to join you in building? Then you shall not build." They tried in every way to molest the workmen and to hinder the work. It costs to make a stand for the Lord, to let the thorny crown be put upon the brow, to take up the cross and follow the Saviour (Acts 14:22).

The Samaritans could not alter the decree of Cyrus giving the Jews permission to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1-3), but they hired lawyers to frustrate the efforts of the Jews to carry it out. Legal accusations were sent to each succeeding Persian ruler, so that the progress of building was very slow. Our worst enemies are not those on the outside, but those who are with us, although not of us (Psa. 41:9; 55:12, 13; John 13:18, 19; 1 John 2:19).

Finally, a formal communication to the king was sent by

three officers, probably deputy governors of the provinces of the Persian Empire west of the Euphrates, and signed by representatives of the various alien races living in the land (vv. 7-10). They accused the Jews of unlawful ambition, citing evidence of past rebellion to cast reflection upon their present character and future intentions. The build-up seemed plausible, but it was false. They had not the power or the disposition to revolt. Past rebellions had taken place under far different circumstances (2 Kings 18:7; 24:1, 20). Moreover, the suggestion that great Persia might lose control of this small province was ridiculous, and would have been interpreted as a slur upon their power, had the authorities not been blinded by the flattery of the Jews' enemies.

To add to His own glory, the Lord sometimes allows evil to enjoy temporary success; the wicked may prosper for a time and bring his evil devices to pass (Psa. 35:20; 37:7, 35). The opposition cooled the zeal of the Jews (Hagg. 1:2-11), and finally caused the work to be abandoned for about 15 years (vv. 23, 24). The Lord, however, inspired His prophets to bring new courage to leaders and people, so that the work, although materially hindered, was at length completed (Ezra 5:1; 6:14, 15).

The Jews were justified in refusing to sanction united worship and spiritual effort with the idolatrous Samaritans, but they failed to give an effective witness to their neighbours. The Lord desired that His people be a peculiar people unto Himself, but at the same time proclaim Him among the nations (Lev. 20:24, 26; Deut. 14:2; 26:18, 19; John. 4:23, 24; Ezek. 36:23). There is a world of difference between separation and isolation; we are to hate the sin, but love the sinner (Rom. 5:8; Heb. 7:26). We who remain in the world, while not of the world, are to testify to the world (John 17:15, 16; Matt. 5:14-16). The Jews isolated themselves in pride, whereas the Samaritans built a rival temple at Mount Gerizim (John 4:20), and a strong antipathy arose between the two peoples (John 4:9).

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- Sept. 4—Compromise Suggested by PharaohExod. 8:25-32.
- Sept. 5—Compromise Rejected by MosesExod. 10:8-11, 24-27.
- Sept. 6—Separation Enjoined Upon Israel Lev. 20:22-26.
- Sept. 7—Separation Enjoined Upon Christians 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1.
- Sept. 8—Separation the Condition of Blessing Deut. 7:1-13.
- Sept. 9—Temporary Success for the Enemy Ezra 4:17-24.
- Sept. 10—Strong Measures Against the Enemy Ezra 5.

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