

Poetry.

Our Evening Hymn.

BY PROF. W. C. RICHARDS.

From the darkness of the night Grant us, Lord, a heavenly light; For its chilling dews—distil Thy sweet grace from Zion's hill.

With the day our toils decline, Let thy light around us shine; And while earthly turmoils cease, For our care we crave thy peace.

As thy gifts our sins exceed— Sins of thought and word and deed, Let our love our guilt outweigh, Growing with thy grace each day.

While the night shades round us close, Guard us from our fears and foes; As in waking hours, still keep All our thoughts with thee in sleep.

When we sleep to wake no more On Time's dull and shifting shore, May we from that slumber wake, With the saints, for Jesus' sake!

—Baptist Weekly.

Sabbath School Department.

[From the Christian Helper.]

International Bible Lessons.

Lesson VI. February 9.

THE KEEPING OF THE SABBATH.

Neh. xiii. 15-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."—Exodus xx. 8.

Time.—About fifteen or twenty years after the events related in the last lesson. B. C. 429-424.

Place.—Jerusalem.

Exposition.

V. 15. Those days, i. e., after Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem and whilst engaged in reforming the abuses which had sprung up during his absence. Wine-presses. Among the Jews these "consisted of two receptacles or vats placed at different elevations, in the upper one the grapes were trodden, while the lower one received the expressed juice. The two vats were usually dug or hewn out of the solid rock. Ancient wine-presses, so constructed, are still to be seen in Palestine."—Smith. The wine-presses were generally constructed in the vineyards (see Matthew xii. 83), but in times of war and danger they were built in cities and Nehemiah may have seen the treading going on in Jerusalem. On the Sabbath. See Exodus xx. 8-11; xxxi. 12-19. The Jews seem to have desecrated the Sabbath before their captivity. See Jeremiah xvii. 21-27. Their captivity must have resulted in an almost total disregard for the seventh day, for they were then subject to their heathen conquerors who kept not the Sabbath themselves and would hardly permit their captive Jews to "do no manner of work" on that day. "On the return from captivity the Sabbath rest appears to have been one of the institutions most difficult to re-establish."—Cook. Bringing in Sheaves etc. These various operations seem to have been witnessed in Jerusalem. Remember that "in the east the farmers all live in villages and towns, and go forth to cultivate the surrounding country. It is not unusual, therefore for them to bring home their harvest to thrash it."—Thompson. Testified in the day, i. e., protested concerning the day, protested against the desecration of it. That they would not desecrate the Sabbath was one of the points of their covenant, made with God a few years before this. See Neh. x. 31.

V. 16. Men of Tyre. "Since the days of David and Solomon the Jews had always had business dealings with the merchants of Tyre." The east coast of the Mediterranean, on which Tyre was situated, abounded in fish. For carrying on their trading some Tyrians seem to have made Jerusalem their home, and their presence would only have the effect of leading to violations of God's law.

V. 17. The nobles etc. i. e., the higher classes the men of influence generally. Contended. On the one hand Nehemiah backed up by the law of God, on the other, all the buyers and sellers and farmers with their trade interests, and their crops and their eagerness for gain.

V. 18. Not only had they God's command concerning the Sabbath, but they also had before them their nation's experience in being punished for neglect of this command. In the face of both of these they were now desecrating the seventh day.

V. 19. The Jews regarded the Sabbath as commencing at sunset of the previous day. That the gates should be shut, etc., so that there could be no going out and in of traders and husbandmen, and that the city might be quiet on the sacred day. Some of my servants. Nehemiah's policy was always thoroughgoing; not only did he command that the gates should be shut but he also set watchmen to see that they were kept shut and that no burden should be brought in.

V. 20. So the merchants . . . lodged. No doubt surprised and vexed with the new order of things, and looked out for a stray customer outside of the gate, or for a chance to get in by stealth, or impatiently waiting till the Sabbath was past.

V. 21. But Nehemiah was not the man to leave his work half done. Had these men been allowed to thus congregate before the gate the result would have been that they would have got in some way, and the attempt at reform would have been defeated. The threat of this verse put an end to it. This verse is exceedingly laconic; evidently Nehemiah was a man not to be trifled with.

V. 22. Cleanse themselves. This refers to ceremonial cleansing, which consisted in washing with water, and (if the offence or defilement was great enough) offering sacrifice. That they should . . . keep the gates. "At first Ne-

hemiah had employed his own retainers in keeping the gates. But, as this was inconvenient, he now made a change, and assigned it to the Levites, as one which belonged to them, since the object of the regulation was the due observance of the Sabbath."—Cook. Remember me O my God. See Heb. vi. 10; Matt. x. 42; 2 Tim. iv. 7-8. God's children are rewarded here and hereafter for their faithfulness, and this by no means conflicts with the truth that we are "justified freely by his grace."

Remarks.

1. Is the obligation to keep the Sabbath still binding? The command to keep it is one of the ten commandments, not a part of the Mosaic ceremonial law. Christ did not repeal this law but always kept it himself. What he did oppose was the turning of Sabbath observance into a heavy burden instead of making it a blessing to man. See Mark ii. 23-28. In a question of this kind the example of the apostles is authoritative, and they always observed a day of rest. God has written this law, not only in the Bible but in our nature with its necessities; we need one day in seven of special rest for our bodies, of special worship for our souls.

2. The question of Sabbath observance is a leading one in our day. There is a continual struggle on the part of many to turn it into a day of pleasure-seeking.

3. Men cannot work seven days in the week. This has frequently been proved in the experience of those who have tried it. "Had it not been for the Sabbath, I have no doubt I should have been a maniac long ago." This was said by an eminent merchant, and another who heard him went on to tell of another merchant, who taking no Sabbath rest, was then in the insane asylum."—Petoulet. Physicians unite with moralists and theologians in testifying to the necessity of observing the day of rest.

4. Nehemiah, a noble example of a man of principle who would never wink at evil. With what integrity and nobleness of soul he conducted himself from first to last.

5. Verse 18. Not only do men who pursue evil courses, transgress God's law, but they show themselves to be great fools. Before them are numerous examples of those who have pursued similar courses and have come to a bad end, and yet they will not be warned. "A sinned cat minds the fire," but many men refuse to learn even from their own experience the folly of sin. Let us be wise and learn from the past, for from it comes a thousand voices warning us against the transgression of God's law and encouraging us in the path of obedience.

6. Learn this lesson from the past; the men and the nations that have kept the Lord's day have prospered, and vice versa.

Teach the Children to Give.

One reason why there are so many stingy persons in the churches is that they were never taught to give in childhood. There is no hope of a largely increased benevolence in our churches until the children are taught to give. Benevolence is as much capable of cultivation as any other Christian grace, and as much needs it. Let any one test this by experiment and he will find it true.

Therefore our Sunday Schools ought to be enlisted in the missionary work. It may not be best to organize juvenile missionary societies, but the Sunday Schools ought to have stated times for taking missionary collections. A Sunday School that lives for itself, like a church that does the same thing, is apt to live a poor and useless life.

Pastors and Superintendents, see that your Sunday Schools are taught to contribute to the spread of the Gospel.

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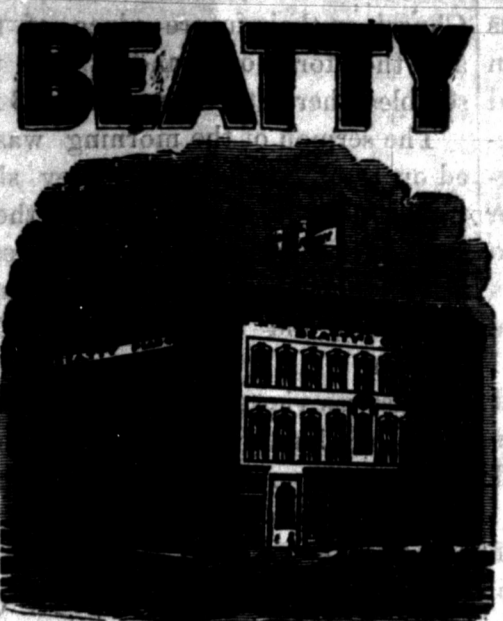
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