

or for the protection of the disciples, but they were enough to bring them within the definition of transgressors and Christ was "reckoned among them."

THE GREATEST PRACTICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST WAR

The above is the construction that Rev. Herbert Booth, son of General Booth, places upon the passage and this interpretation is strengthened and confirmed by the 10th and 11th verses of the 18th chapter of John: "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath." See, also, the 51st and 52d verses of the 26th chapter of Matthew.

Both John and Matthew describe the incident in which one of the disciples (John says that it was impulsive Peter) drew his sword in defense of Christ and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Christ rebuked him for this resort to force.

In John, He is reported as saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" In Matthew, Christ uses a terrific condemnation of force which is a continuing prophecy, continuously fulfilled: "For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," Christ adds: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"

These passages would seem to prove conclusively that the purchase of swords, advised by the Saviour, was not with a view to use, but rather for the fulfillment of prophecy. Instead of giving comfort to militarists, the incident brings out the strongest practical argument ever advanced against war.

HOW GOD USES HUMAN BEINGS

Next, we come to the statement of Ezra that "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." The king was not a worshipper of Jehovah and yet he received a communication from the Almighty.

We are not told the form in which this communication came. In other cases we have read that an angel appeared or that the voice of the Lord was heard, but here the medium through which the communication came is not given, but the message was understood and acted upon. God uses human beings to accomplish His purposes; sometimes they are conscious of the call, and sometimes they act without knowledge of the hand that directs or of the purposes which they are sent to accomplish.

In Exodus we read that the Lord dealt with Pharaoh in quite a different way. Instead of stirring up the heart of Pharaoh to a great deed, he "hardened Pharaoh's heart" that God's wonders might be multiplied in the land of Egypt. It was not, however, until Pharaoh had conspired against the Israelites and directed the murder of the children.

SURRENDER OF A WICKED HEART

When one deliberately chooses sin and enters upon a career of crime, God knows better than man what punishment will be sufficient to accomplish His purpose and to bring about the surrender of a wicked heart. It required seventy years of exile and captivity in Babylon to reduce the children of Israel to submission; when the work was accomplished and the change wrought God stirred up the heart of a good king to win immortal fame by a kindly act.

When Pharaoh set out to suppress a race by killing the male children of the Jews at birth God let him have his way until the slaying of the Egyptian first-born humbled this mighty monarch and then Pharaoh let the Children of Israel go. God's mercy is as certain to aid those who do His will as His punishments are sure to overtake the disobedient.

However God's message was conveyed to Cyrus, it is evident that he felt that he was acting under divine compulsion, for in his proclamation he announced that the Lord God of heaven had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. It was an acknowledgment that many rulers do not make; too often kings attribute their power to their own ability and influence.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

Before taking up the succeeding verses, a word in regard to the effect of the captivity.

The Children of Israel went off after heathen gods; they continually forgot God. The prophets were kept busy warning them that the wrath of God followed disobedience and that punishment was sure. The tribes were rent by jealousies and personal ambitions; and then came overwhelming defeat, the destruction of Jerusalem, the looting of the temple, and the bondage of the people.

Here we find one of the great lessons of history, namely, that prosperity sometimes wrecks peoples as well as individuals, while adversity often restores men and nations through repent-

ance and sacrifice. Man's measurements are often faulty; he rejoices in good fortune only to find that it is sometimes poison to him; and he weeps over misfortune often to find in it a needed discipline and a health-restoring tonic.

When a childless couple, possessing great wealth, adopt some poor widow's child, the neighbors are apt to exclaim, "Fortunate child!" Not always. Anticipated wealth has ruined more young men than it has ever blessed. A widow's son may have a better chance.

THE DOUBLE BLESSING OF HARDSHIPS

The pillars of the church, of the State, and of commerce have not, as a rule, been the pampered children of the wealthy; they have nearly all come through hardship and privation. Hardships and privation confer a double blessing—they give discipline and prevent luxury.

Many a boy has found himself after his patrimony has been squandered, but climbing is easier when one begins at the bottom of the hill than when the ascent begins at the bottom of a pit into which he has fallen. As the poet has put it:

The gates of hell are open night and day,
Smooth is the descent and easy is the way;
But to return and view the cheerful skies,
In this the task and mighty labor lies.

The Children of Israel had sinned and suffered, and now we see regeneration wrought by bitter experience. They had been born again, so to speak; they are ready to bring forth works meet for repentance. The fullness of time had come and a deliverer was at hand.

Daniel's loyalty to God and the striking evidence given to God's guardianship over him, a captive, had made its impression upon the Babylonian empire and may have weighed largely in bringing Cyrus up to the high task which he performed. The proclamation made by Cyrus included all of the Israelites who desired to return to Jerusalem—"Who is there among you of all His people?" There was no compulsion; if any remained, they were to help those who prepared for the journey back to the homeland.

AN EXAMPLE IN GENEROSITY

The order was obeyed, everybody was busy, the great day to which they had looked forward for seventy bitter years had at last arrived. Cyrus set an example in generosity that could not but have touched the hearts of the others. He sent for the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had brought, as spoils, from the temple at Jerusalem and had put in the house of his heathen gods. Mithredath, the treasurer, had kept count of them—five thousand four hundred gold and silver pieces—and all were sent back with the returning exiles.

This act stands out in the life of Cyrus as evidence either of a very noble spirit or of complete submission to the purpose of God. If the return of the holy vessels taken in war was the prompting of his own heart, it showed an exalted character, a character quite different from that of other kings and potentates of that day. If, on the other hand, he recognized this as a part of the command of the Almighty when his heart was stirred to release the Children of Israel, it shows how complete was his surrender to the command of the Almighty.

And so the exiles set out on their return to their beloved city. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." We may not at the time be able to see the hand of God shaping the affairs of men, but it is apparent when we look back over the past and see how all things work together for the carrying out of the divine will.

THE JOY OF DOING GOD'S WORK By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR AUGUST 6 (Ezra 3:10-13; 6:14-16)

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, giving thanks unto the Lord, because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the

prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia.

And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

The seven brief verses from the book of Ezra that we study today are a hallelujah chorus. They give us one of the most exultant lessons in the Bible; they make plain how each and every one of us can live, here and now, the life of delight.

A people released from bondage, after being chastened by adversity, set out from Babylon to Jerusalem, in fulfillment of prophecy, to rebuild the temple of the living God. With a zeal deepened by suffering and enlarged by renewed devotion, the Children of Israel begin their joyous task.

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It makes a great difference whether the worker is happy or sullen. Only willing workers can do their best; when willingness rises into joy, work ceases to be work. Hence, the importance of choosing a work in which one takes pleasure and pride. No one can make much of a success out of any work so long as it is drudgery to him; one seldom fails where his heart is in his work.

MORE MUSIC IN THE FIELD OF INDUSTRY

Just now our country and the world need more music in the field of industry.

The antagonism between employer and employee is one of the most unfavorable signs of the present day. There is a growing class consciousness among the members of the two groups known as capitalists and laborers—that is, thinking in terms of class rather than in terms of the whole. There is even an increasing dread of what many regard as an inevitable conflict.

So long as this condition exists the laborer cannot give to society the maximum of his producing power; neither can the employer supply the highest organizing and directing ability. The future cannot be entirely bright until these two classes are brought into harmonious co-operation. It is the business of the Church to reconcile differences by the establishment of justice and the cultivation of the spirit of brotherhood.

The doctrine of "investigation before war," now embodied in treaties between this country and three-quarters of the world, should be applied at home. Investigation before strike or lockout—not compulsory arbitration, but investigation with independence of action reserved—would go far toward removing suspicion and establishing that friendship which is essential to the best results. It would speak peace to the industrial world.

THE TASKS OF LARGEST SATISFACTION

While every one should be busy, every one has a right to choose the largest work that he can do—it is his duty to do so. Only when each one is engaged in the largest task within his reach can the total work done by all reach its maximum. Between two tasks of equal size one has a right to choose that which is most congenial to his taste, for here, too, he is employing his energies to the best advantage.

This does not mean that he should refuse small tasks when large ones are not available or that he should turn down unpleasant tasks and spend his time in idleness, waiting for something he likes; small tasks grow into large ones as the talents are employed, and unpleasant tasks become bearable when they are the only ones in sight.

Of all the tasks, the unselfish ones yield the largest satisfaction. There is an alloy in all that we do for ourselves alone. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," as any one can testify who has tried both. The Children of Israel were engaged in more than an altruistic work; it was a religious undertaking, and religion touches the deepest springs in our lives.

A GREAT DAY SUCH AS FEW HAVE SEEN

"But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy."

They wept and shouted together; the foun-