

THE SUN DIAL OF AHAZ

Hezekiah, the King, Lay Dying in His Palace.

Praying for Recovery, He Is Told That He Will Get Well—As a Sign the Shadow Moves Backward on the Dial—The Lesson.

Dr. Talmage's text was: II Kings 20:11, "And Isaiah, the prophet cried unto the Lord: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz."

Here is the first clock or watch or chronometer or time-piece of which the world has any knowledge. But it was a watch that did not tick and a clock that did not strike. It was a sun-dial. Ahaz, the king, invented it. Between the hours given to state-craft and the cares of office he invented something by which he could tell the time of day. This sun-dial may have been a great column, and when the shadow of that column reached one point it was 9 o'clock a. m., and when it reached another point it was 3 o'clock p. m., and all the hours and half-hours were so measured. Or it may have been a flight of stairs such as may now be found in Hindustan and other old countries, and when the shadow reached one step it was 10 o'clock a. m., or another step it was 4 o'clock p. m., and likewise other hours may have been indicated.

The clepsydra or water-clock followed the sun-dial, and the sand-glass followed the clepsydra. Then came the candle-clock of Alfred the Great, and the candle was marked into three parts, and while the first part was burning he gave himself to religion and while the second part was burning he gave himself to politics and while the third part was burning he gave himself to rest. After a while came the wheel and weight clock and Pope Sylvester II was its most important inventor. And the skill of centuries of exquisite mechanism toiled at the time-pieces until the world had Viole's clock of the fourteenth century and Huyghens, the inventor, swung the first pendulum, and Dr. Hooke contrived the recoil escapement. And the "endless chain" followed, and the "ratchet and pinion lever" took its place; and the compensation balance and the stem-winder followed, and now we have the buzz and clang of the great clock and watch factories of Switzerland and Germany and England and America, turning out what seems to be the perfection of time-pieces. It took the world 6,000 years to make the present chronometer.

So with the measurement of longer spaces than minutes and hours. Time was calculated from new moon to new moon; then from harvest to harvest. Then the year was pronounced to be 354 days and 300 days, and not a long while after, 365 days. Then events were calculated from the foundation of Rome, afterward from the Olympic games. Then the Babylonians had their measurement of the year and the Romans theirs and the Armenians theirs and the Hindus theirs. Chronology was busy for centuries studying monuments, inscriptions, coins, mummies and astronomy, trying to lay a plan by which all question of dates might be settled and events put in their right place in the procession of the ages. But the Chronologists only heaped up a mountain of confusion and bewilderment until in the sixth century Dionysius Exiguus, a Roman abbot, said: "Let everything date from the birth at Bethlehem of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world." The Abbot proposed to have things dated backward and forward from that great event. What a splendid thought for the world! What a mighty thing for Christianity! It would have been most natural to date everything from the creation of the world. But I am glad the chronologists could not too easily guess how old the world was in order to get the nations in the habit of dating from that occurrence in its documents and histories. Forever fixed is it that all history is to be dated with reference to the birth of Christ, and, this matter settled, Hales the chief chronologist, declared that the world was made 5,411 years before Christ, and the deluge came 3,155 years before Christ and all the illustrious events of the last nineteen centuries and all the great events of all time to come have been or shall be dated from the birth of Christ. These things I say that you may know what a watch is, what a clock is, what an almanac is, and learn to appreciate through what toils and hardships and perplexities the world came to its present conveniences and comforts, and to help you to more respectful consideration of that sun-dial of Ahaz planted in my text.

We are told that Hezekiah, the king, was dying of a boil. It must have been one of the worst kind of carbuncles, a boil without any central core and sometimes deathful. A fig was put upon it as a poultice. Hezekiah did not want to die then. His son who was to take the kingdom had not yet been born and Hezekiah's death would have been the death of the nation. So he prays for recovery and is told he will get well. But he wants some miraculous sign to make him sure of it. He has the choice of having the shadow on the sun dial of Ahaz advance or retreat. He replied it would not be so wonderful to have the sun go down, for it always goes down sooner or later. He asks that it go backward. In other words, let the day instead of going on toward sundown, turn and go toward sunrise. I see the invalid king bolstered up and wrapped in blankets looking out of the window upon the sun dial in the courtyard. While he watches the shadow on the dial the shadow begins to retreat. Instead of going on toward 6 o'clock in the evening it goes back toward 6 o'clock in the morning. The fig poultice had been drawing for some time and, sure enough, the boil broke and Hezekiah got well. Now I expect you will come on with your higher criticism and try to explain this away and say it was an optical delusion of Hezekiah, and the shadow only seemed to go back, or a cloud came over and it was uncertain which way the shadow did go and as

Hezekiah expected it to go back he took the action of his own mind for the retrograde movement. No; the shadow went back on all the dials of that land and other lands. Turn to II Chronicles, xxxiii: 31, and find that away off in Babylon the mighty men of the palace noticed the same phenomenon. And if you do not like Bible authority, turn over your copy of Herodotus and find that away off in Egypt the people noticed that there was something the matter with the sun. The fact is that the whole universe waits upon God and suns and moons and stars are not very big things to him, and he can with his little finger turn back an entire world as easily as you could set back the hour hand or minute hand of your clock or watch.

At the opening of a new year people are moralizing on the flight of time. You all feel that you are moving on toward sundown and many of you are under a consequent depression. I propose this morning to set the hands on your watches and clocks to going the other way. I propose to show you how you may make the shadow of your dial like the shadow on the dial of Ahaz to stop going forward and make it go backward. You think I have a big undertaking on hand, but it can be done if the same Lord who reversed the shadow in Hezekiah's courtyard moves upon us. While looking at the sun-dial of Hezekiah and we find the shadow retreating, we ought to learn that God controls the shadows. We are all ready to acknowledge his management of the sunshine. We stand in the glow of a bright morning and we say in our feelings if not with so many words, "This life is from God, this warmth is from God." Or, we have a rush of prosperity and we say, "These successes are from God. What a providential thing it was I bought that lot just before the rise of real estate! How grateful to God I am that I made that investment! Why, they have declared 10 per cent. dividend! What a mercy it was that I sold out my shares before that collapse!" Oh, yes; we acknowledge God in the sunshine of a bright day or the sunshine of a great prosperity. But suppose the day is dark? You have to light the gas at noon. The sun does not show itself all day long. There is nothing but shadow. How slow we are to realize that the storm is from God and the darkness from God and the chill from God. Or, we buy the day before the market's retreat; or we make an investment that never pays; or we purchase goods that cannot be disposed of; or a crop of grain we sowed is ruined by drouth or frost; or when we took account of stock on the 1st of January we found ourselves thousands of dollars worse off than we expected. Who under such circumstances says, "This loss is from God; I must have been allowed to go into that unfortunate enterprise for some good reason; God controls the east wind as well as the west wind?"

My friends, I cannot look for one moment on that retrograde shadow on Ahaz's dial without learning that God controls the shadows and that lesson we need all to learn. That he controls the sunshine is not so necessary a lesson, for everybody can be happy when things go right. When you sleep eight hours a night and rise with an appetite that cannot easily wait for breakfast and you go over to the store and open your mail to read more orders than you can fill, and in the next letter you find a dividend far larger than you have been promised, and your neighbor comes in to tell you some flattering thing he has just heard said about you, and you find that all the styles of goods in which you deal have advanced 15 per cent. in value, and on your way home you meet your children in full romp and there are roses on the center of the tea table and roses of health in cheeks all around the table, what more do you want of consolation? I don't pity you a bit. You feel as if you could boss the world. But for those in just opposite circumstances my text comes in with an omnipotence of meaning. The shadow! Oh, the shadow! Shadow of bereavement! Shadow of sickness! Shadow of bankruptcy! Shadow of mental depression! Shadow of persecution! Shadow of death! Speak out, Oh, sun-dial of Ahaz, and tell all the people that God manages the shadow! As Hezekiah sat in his palace window wrapped in invalidism and surrounded by anodynes and cataplasms and looked out upon the black hand of the only clock known at that time and saw it move back ten degrees, he learned a lesson that a majority of the human race need this hour to learn—that the best friend a man ever had controls the shadow. The set-backs are some of the best things that can happen. The great German author Schiller could not work unless he had in his room the scent of rotten apples, and the decay of the fruits of earthly prosperity may become an inspiration instead of a depression. Robert Chambers' lame feet shut him up from other work, and he became the world-renowned publisher, and helped fashion the best literature of the ages. The painful disorder like that of Hezekiah called a carbuncle is spelled exactly the same as the precious stone called the carbuncle, and the pang of suffering may become the jewel of immortal value. Your set-back like that of Ahaz's sun-dial may be recovery and triumph. I never had a set-back but it turned out to be a set forward. You never would have become a Christian if you had not had a set-back. The highest thrones in heaven are for the set-backs. In 1801 the shadow of the sun-dial of this nation was set back, and all things seemed going to ruin; and it was set back further in 1862, and further in 1863, and still further in 1865, but there is not an intelligent and well-balanced man, north or south, east or west, but feels it was set back toward the sunrise.

But I promised to show you how the shadows might be turned back. First, by going much among the young people in most family circles there are grandchildren. By this divine arrangement most of the people who have passed the meridian of life can compass themselves by juvenility. It is a bad thing for an old man or old woman to sit looking at the vicinity of their grandchildren shouting, "Stop that racket!" Better join in the fun. Let the 80-year-old grandfather join the 8-year-old grandson or granddaughter. My father lived to see over eighty children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and a more boisterous crew were never turned out on this sublimity sphere, and they all seemed

to cry to the old folks, "Keep young," and they did keep young. Don't walk with a cane unless you have to, or only as a defense in a city afflicted with too many canines. Don't wear glasses stronger than necessary, putting on number tens when eighteens will do as well. Don't go into the company of those who are always talking about rheumatism and lumbago and shortness of breath and the brevity of human life. It is too much for my gravity to hear an octogenarian talking about the shortness of human life. From all I can find out he has always been here and from present prospects he is always going to stay. Remain young. Hang up your stockings in Christmas time. Help the boys fly the kite. Teach the girls how to dress their dolls. Better than arica for your stiff joints and cutnip tea for your sleepless nights will be a large dose of youthful companionship.

Set back the clock of human life. Make the shadows of the sun-dial of Ahaz retreat 10 degrees. People make themselves old by always talking about being old and wishing for the good old days, which were never as good as these days. From all I can hear the grandchildren are not half as bad as the grandparents were. Matters have been hushed up. But if you have ever been in a room adjoining a room where some very old people a little deaf were talking over old times you will find that this age does not monopolize all the young rascals. It may now be hard to get young people up early in the morning but their grandparents always had to be pulled out of bed. It is wrong now to play mischievous tricks on the unsuspecting, but eighty years ago at school that now venerable man sat down on a crooked pin not accidentally placed there, and purposely drove the sleigh riding party too near the edge of the embankment that he might see how they would look when tumbled into the snow. And that man who has so little patience with childish exuberance was in olden times up to pranks one-half of which if practiced by the 8-year-old of today, would set grandfather and grandmother crazy. Reverse your remembrance of what you were between 5 and 10 years of age, and with patience capable of every thing join with the young. Put back the shadow of the dial not 10 degrees but 50 and 60 and 70 degrees.

Set back your clocks also by entering on new and absorbing Christian work. In our desire to inspire the young we have in our essays had much to say about what has been accomplished by the young; of Romulus who founded Rome when he was 20 years of age; of Cortes, who had conquered Mexico at 30 years; of Pitt, who was prime minister of England at 24 years; of Raphael, who died at 37 years; of Calvin, who wrote his institute at 20; of Melancthon, who took a learned professor's chair at 21 years; of Luther, who had conquered Germany for the reformation by the time he was 35 years. And it is all very well for us to show how early in life one can do very great things for God and the welfare of the world, but some of the mightiest work for God has been done by septuagenarians and octogenarians and nonagenarians. Indeed, there is work which none but such can do. They preserve the equipoise of senates, of religious denominations, of reformatory movements. Young men for action, old men for counsel. Instead of any of you beginning to fold up your energies, arouse anew your energy. With the experience you have obtained and the opportunities of observation you have had during a long life, you ought to be able to do in one year now more than you did in ten years right after you had passed out of your teens. Physical power less, your spiritual power ought to be more. Up to the last hour of their lives what power for good did Dr. Archibald Alexander, old Dr. Woods, old Dr. Hawes, old Dr. Milnor, old Dr. McVaine, old Dr. King, old Dr. Candlish, old Dr. Chalmers. What have been Bismarck to Germany, and Gladstone to England, and Oliver Wendell Holmes to America in the time of an advanced age? Let me say to those in the afternoon of life: Don't be putting off the harness; when God wants it off he will take it off. Don't be frightened out of life by the grip many are. At the first sneeze of an influenza many give up all as lost. No new terror has come on the earth. The microbes as the cause of disease were described in the Talmud 1,700 years ago as "invisible legions of dangerous ones." Don't be scared out of life by all this talk about heart failure. That trouble has always been in the world. That is what all the people that ever passed out of this life have died of—heart failure. Adam had it and all of his descendants have had it or will have it. Do not be watching for symptoms, or you will have symptoms of everything. Some of you will yet die of symptoms. Symptoms are often only what we sometimes see in the country, a dead owl nailed on the barn door to scare living owls. Put your trust in God, go to bed at 10 o'clock, have the window open six inches to let in the fresh air, sleep on your right side, and fear nothing. The old maxim was right: "Get thy spindle and distaff ready, and God will send thee flax."

A Sympathetic Jury. First Female Juror (some years hence)—There seems to be no doubt that the prisoner, Mr. Handicash, stole a hundred thousand from the company that employed him. Was he indulgent to his wife? Second Female Juror—Yes, indeed. He gave her everything she wanted. Third Female Juror—She had just a lovely time! Trips to Europe, Worth's dresses, opera box, everything. Verdict—We, the jury in the case of Mr. Handicash, find that the prisoner was an over indulgent husband, who should be reprimanded by the court, the company to pay the costs.

Nothing Remarkable. Mrs. Grumpus (looking up from the paper)—A brother and sister who had not seen each other for sixteen years met accidentally the other day. Mr. Grumpus—Huh! A brother and sister seldom meet any other way. Rather Tired of It. St. Peter—Let me see, miss, where are you from? New Arrival—I am from Boston. St. Peter (playfully)—Ah, yes. I have heard of Boston. New Arrival—Now, see here. If you say one word about beans, I won't go in.

AS SHE IS SPOKE IN PENNSYLVANIA.

English as It is Taught by a Pretty Berks County School Teacher.

She was a buxom, ruddy cheeked, clear-eyed Berks county maiden of 20, neatly dressed, snug, and tidy, a teacher of a country school in Heidelberg township; probably as bright a young schoolmarm as could be found anywhere hereabout; one from whose red lips the mongrel English dialect of the region fell more softly and with less uncouthness than usually characterizes the speech of the Pennsylvania Dutch. It was on an afternoon this week, and she stood at the blackboard before a mixed class of little girls and boys, elucidating some mysteries in reading and writing. She seemed a trifle embarrassed by the presence of half a dozen picnicers who had fled to the log schoolhouse for refuge from a sudden shower, but this embarrassment only served to heighten the brightness of her cheek and eye, and to increase the earnestness which she threw into her demonstration.

With a piece of chalk she traced on the blackboard the letters:

"P—i—g."

Then, addressing her pupils, she asked, "Vos is dos?"

The class responded instantly, in loud chorus, "Pick!"

"Yes," said the teacher proudly, "I gif you reightd. How many kindts of pick?"

There was a pause, and then a little blackheaded urchin spoke up. "Three kindts!"

"Ah yes, I gif you reightd again once," responded the fair school mistress, smiling with evident satisfaction at her pupils' creditable showing.

"First?"—and she waited with wooden pointer in air for an answer.

"Von wot grunts," suggested several of the children at once.

"Yes," nodded the teacher, with a rising inflection denoting her pleasure; "and second?"

"Von pick to dick (dig) with," answered a yellow-haired little fellow.

"Yes, and the third kindt?"

Another pause, and then the answer came from a thin-faced little girl, wearing glasses, "Von to pick up!"

"Ah, yes," cried the teacher, triumphantly, glancing at the visitors, and proceeded to write down the definitions in order on the blackboard.

The picnicers withdrew, silently convulsed with merriment, afraid to trust themselves longer in the school room to hear more of the same vein. They are well-known Reading folks, and they vouch for the correctness of the recitation as above reported. If surprise should be expressed at the state of English culture revealed both by the teacher and her pupils let it be stated that she is about as far in advance of her clientele as teachers in more favored communities are of theirs. A similar picture could no doubt be drawn of common schools in many other back townships of Berks, and of Lehigh, Lancaster, and Lebanon as well. The truth is that the chief disadvantage of these worthy people is their lack of booklearning. In natural intelligence, sturdy honesty, and thrift they are considerably above the average, but they cling tenaciously to old customs and entertain an inherited disregard for culture.

Advice to a Young Man. Young men, in your youth either split rails or work on a canal-boat, says *Munsey's Weekly*. Then when you grow older, the Presidential chair may be yours. Do not dream of organizing a youthful band of faithful young followers to go west and slaughter Indians, for the red men, with the assistance of bad whisky and Government ammunition, are killing themselves as fast as possible. Always speak kindly to your sick uncle. He may make a will some day, and perchance he might leave you one of the family spoons, or, even better, you might become the envidious possessor of his antique oak bootjack. When your parents disagree on some slight subject preserve a discreet silence, and, if possible, leave the room, for when your father comes out second best, as he invariably will, he may take revenge on your youthful side. Do not cry when you have to stay indoors and play with the little girls. As you grow older you will find that a little girl is a great comfort, even though she consents to be only a sister to you. In sharing candy with your younger brother always bear in mind that too much would make the little fellow sick. Remembering this, you will always be justified in taking the largest share for yourself.

The Profits of Beggars.

Robert W. Hubbard of the Charity Organization society, who has had many years' experience with the beggars of New York and has, personally, nearly all the famous ones known, says that an industrious beggar will frequently make as much as \$10 and \$15 a day. He has known men who have been begging for some time to have fortunes of \$10,000 and \$15,000. "What is the best game you know of?" I asked him. "Well, I think blind men make the most money as a rule, particularly if they are old men." "What is the best location for beggars in the city?" "Wherever there are women. It is quite the fad for Fifth avenue ladies to step up daintily and drop a few pennies in the hand of a beggar. People have no idea of the amount of money that is squandered every year in perpetuating these paupers. If we had the money that is given each year in maintaining this race of parasites we could rid New York of professional beggars."—*N. Y. World*.

A Small Philosopher.

He was six years old, short of his age and barefooted and dirty. His eyes were sharp and watchful and his face was lined and old. He ran away from school for weeks at a time and scoured alleys and instinctively avoided all the conventional and decorous paths of childhood. When he listened to admonitions and promised to amend, his inner ear was deaf and his words were from the lips outward, but he voiced his genuine experience and reflection with the brevity of a maxim: "I think I'd rather be a girl; they don't git so many kicks."—*Detroit Free Press*.

The New Military Balloon.

Some one has discovered that a new military balloon has been invented which is so small that when collapsed it can be carried in the knapsack, and that this remarkable balloon is henceforth to form part of the equipment of the French soldier. How it is to be used we are not told, but can easily imagine. When the army is on the march each soldier will carry his balloon attached to his shoulders and partially inflated, so as nearly to counterbalance his weight. This will enable him to advance by a series of enormous bounds, much after the fashion of the kangaroo, and will make it quite possible for him to attain a speed of, say, twenty miles an hour. On meeting the enemy the balloons will be completely inflated, and the whole army will soar into the air, and from an elevation of 1,000 or 2,000 feet will drop dynamite on its foes. Of course the new balloon will not have sufficient power to support horses or canuons, and hence their use will be confined to the infantry, but nothing is more obvious than that infantry capable of aerial evolutions will be immeasurably superior to infantry compelled by want of balloons to confine their operations to the surface of the earth.—*N. Y. Herald*.

Mr. Stinter (examining some accounts on desk)—"I think I prefer the courting to the wedding days. Then there was alternate billing and cooing, now it seems to be about all 'billing.'"—*Boston Courier*.

AN AFRICAN PUMPKIN.

The Gamhan, a Plant that Grows on the Island of Socotra.

Through their many biological peculiarities the family of the pompon has become known to everybody. Cucumbers, melons and pumpkins belong to the heaviest fruits and yet they grow on a very slender stalk. But as a protection against being torn by the weight of the fruit the trunk of the plant either creeps along the ground or winds around other plants or props that happen in its way. Bearing this fact in mind, it is all the more surprising to know that among this genus of plants a specimen is found that deviates from the rule of being a creeper and grows like a tree.

The home of the Dendroiceyos is the Dark Continent, and this is undoubtedly the reason why we have not been made acquainted with it earlier. It grows on the Island of Socotra, where the plant is known by the name of gamhan. Wellsted, who visited the island in 1834, was the first to mention it in his "Memoirs on the Island of Socotra." In 1880 Socotra was traversed by Bailey Balfour, the well-known botanist, and he describes two kinds of gamhan. In the following year Prof. Schweinfurth made a trip from Cairo to Socotra, and to him we are indebted for the first pictorial view of this plant. The trunk is knoll-shaped and grows about 14 feet high, with a diameter of from 3 to 6 feet. The rind is white as chalk and perfectly smooth, and the clumsy trunks among the green shrubby look more like marble columns than anything else. Near Tanarid, the largest village on the northern coast of Socotra, these plants grow in such large numbers that one's imagination need not stretch very greatly in comparing the forest hills of Socotra with a graveyard full of marble monuments.

These plants attain a venerable age; Wellsted reports having found at Kadhub, not far from Tanarid, in the bark of a gamhan trunk an Arabian inscription bearing the date of 1640. The fact that this inscription has remained intact so long also demonstrates that gamhan does not shed its bark like our trees by the formation of scabs. The wood is not solid and compact like that of the trees we know, but full of sap and cuts like a turnip. A pen-knife is sufficient to cut a stairway into the trunk of a gamhan, over which the flowers on the top can be reached.

Aside from its tree-shape the gamhan resembles the pompon in every detail, so far as the formation of flowers, leaves and roots is concerned.—*N. Y. Recorder*.

The Brilliant Student's Dilemma.

A Harvard student told me an amusing story about himself the other day, says the *Boston Herald*. It seems that recently his mother had a young lady guest at her home on the Back bay and when he came from college in the afternoon he was introduced to her. At dinner, also, she sat opposite to him at the table. He paid little attention to the fair visitor, as his mind was engrossed with a problem in his lessons. However, his brothers were as assiduous as possible in entertaining her. As it happened, the latter had engagements out that evening, and, as Mrs. A. had promised Miss B. to have one of her sons to take her to the theater, it fell to the lot of my friend George, the Harvard man. He accepted the situation gracefully and in due time the young couple set off for the theater. Arriving, George left his companion at one side of the lobby while he stepped up to the box-office and purchased the tickets; then, turning about he looked toward the place where he had parted from the young lady, and was surprised to see half a dozen there, and, ye gods! is it possible?—he could not tell which was his precious charge! Here was a dilemma. George said he immediately decided that rather than risk speaking to the wrong person he would stand still till the young lady spoke to him. So he gazed at his tickets for what seemed to him an age, but was probably only a minute, when Miss B. came up and said: "Oh, I fear you do not recognize me." "Oh, yes—yes," stammered George, equivocating; "yes I did; I thought they had not given me the seats I asked for and was considering what was best to do in the matter." And this was one of the gallant Harvard men!

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