

the hope that this long expected Messiah might come through their family line. Each child continued the line and, therefore, made the blessing possible. Zacharias was overjoyed at the information given him by the angel. The description of the promised son was all that could be desired.

#### JOHN'S MISSION

His father would have joy and gladness and many would be rejoiced at his birth.

He was to be great in the sight of the Lord and would drink neither wine nor strong drink.

He was to be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb.

He was to call back many of the Children of Israel to the Lord their God.

He was to have the spirit and power of Elijah and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"—the coming Messiah.

Zacharias and his wife were so advanced in years that he could hardly believe the promise real. "Whereby shall I know this?" he inquired.

Gabriel, after declaring his name and rank and the purpose of his visit—"to shew thee these glad tidings"—answered:

"Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed."

This was the penalty imposed upon Zacharias for his lack of faith; he went out speechless, making signs to the people who had wondered at his prolonged stay in the temple. He could not speak again until the child was born, when he announced the name John, given by the angel.

#### GOD CALLS HIS MESSENGERS

This was the beginning of a new dispensation. The messenger who was to prepare the way and call the people to repentance had something of the rugged character of Elijah. His was not the pleasant task of intimate association and quiet work; his duty was to call the world to repentance—to startle the Children of Israel with the announcement that the day for which they waited was at hand.

Two thoughts suggest themselves: first, God calls His messengers and prepares them for His work.

As the Holy Ghost was in John from his mother's womb, so when God needs an agent to do His work he fills him with the purpose necessary for the task. We find in this conclusive proof that man has in him, not the blood of the brute, but the breath of the Almighty.

Martyr blood has been necessary to civilization; history turns on the uncompromising characters to whom truth is revealed. What though they pay for their courage with their lives? Life is of little worth if it must be purchased by the suppression of a sense of duty—by the surrender of a profound conviction.

#### THE NEED OF A GODLY HOME

And the child called to a great work needs a home environment to prepare it for its task.

There were many homes in Israel to which a John the Baptist might have been born, but there was no home that had been bome that had been more purified by piety or in which a man with a vision of God could find more congenial companionship.

John inherited traits that aided him in his work and was brought up in a sympathetic environment. The prophetic spark which glowed within his heart was fed by the faith of his parents while they lived.

The estimates of the world are superficial. We are prone to measure people by the influence which they seem to exert in business, in society and in politics. God's records are more trustworthy. A father or mother unknown to fame may, in the final account, have credit for training a world-child, one of whom mankind becomes a debtor.

A few years ago the English edition of the Review of Reviews told of an incident in a prayer meeting. A little girl arose and with trembling voice said:

"If no one else will speak, I must say that I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart."

Her words touched those who heard her and one after another added their testimony. From that prayer meeting went out an influence that spread all over Wales and resulted in the conversion of tens of thousands. Back of the little girl was a mother or a father or both who spoke through the child to succeeding generations. Who can measure such service?

#### NURSERIES FOR GOD'S AMBASSADORS

No visible Gabriel stands by the altar today; no audible voice announces God's plan; but out of families innumerable have come the children of prayer. Fathers have seen in their children answers to supplications; mothers have welcomed them as children born for a purpose.

Such children have from youth been dedicated to God and retained for service, often undefined but none the less expected.

There is no new Saviour to be announced, for Christ is the final word in salvation, but much must yet be done before the teachings of Christ are fully applied for the regeneration of the world. Any home, however humble, may become a nursery of one of God's ambassadors, but it must be a home that furnishes a fitting environment—such as the home which Zacharias and Elisabeth provided for John the Baptist.

#### THE NEED OF THE GODLY HOME

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

#### REVIEW—LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 24

Since the first of the year we have been studying lessons in every-day living from the Old Testament. The remainder of the year we shall devote to the New Testament, but before we begin, let us glance backward along the wonderful path we have come.

The high lights on the history and prophecy of Israel have been presented to us. Great characters of the Old Testament have passed in review, and each character, I hope, has left his impress upon us.

These characters have been real and natural; their weaknesses have not been concealed and their strength has not been exaggerated. From the beginning to end one note runs through the lessons their virtues and their weaknesses have brought before us: Obey and we will be happy; disobey and punishment is sure.

Men and women have been conspicuous according to their faith. They have been weak and vacillating as they trusted themselves and failed to lean on God.

We began with the foolish son of a wise man; he taught the very important lesson that intelligence does not run in the blood. Neither learning nor riches in a parent—not even when that parent is Solomon—can insure a sense of virtue in a child, as the life of Rehoboam shows. The heart is the center of life and the source of the wisdom that directs the footsteps aright. "Blessed are the pure in heart."

#### THE SUBLIMITY OF GOD'S SPOKESMAN

In Elijah we catch a glimpse of the sublimity of man when he is the spokesman of God: the kingly power of a wicked ruler like Ahab is made to appear ridiculous when matched against the personality of the rugged Tishbite.

Then comes Elisha, a farmer summoned from his plow to work wonders by the power of the God who called him. He immortalized Naaman, the leper, conferred enduring fame on the Shunamite woman, and revealed to mortal eye the hosts invisible which came within striking distance of every great moral battlefield.

Jonah, the first of the missionaries, appears for a moment; first a craven fleeing from duty, then as bold a messenger as ever called a people to repentance, and finally he steps from the stage in a fit of petulance.

In Amos we have a shepherd leaving his flocks to rebuke the worshippers of the god of ease as they endanger a nation by their indolence, drunkenness and gluttony. Asa's uprightness glows like a beacon light. The love of the boy Joash for the house of God teaches every parent that the heart is capable of being turned to God in its tender years. Uzziah's career illustrates anew the world-old lesson that false pride invariably leads to punishment.

#### DRAMATIC OLD TESTAMENT CHAPTERS

We hear the dramatic call made to Isaiah to be about the Lord's business; we behold his splendid vision of peace; his lofty prophetic utterances ring in our ears.

We rejoice with the godly of ancient days when Hilkiah discovers the long-lost Book of Law and restores the Word of God to a nation; we listen eagerly as Jeremiah pleads with his people to heed the Word of God; and our hearts leap with joy as we are told how the marvelous memory of Jeremiah confounded Jehoiakim's attempt to destroy that Word.

Then Ezekiel, the watchman of Israel, defines for all time the law of responsibility. Then comes the wonderful Daniel, with his stern habits, his consecrated courage and his interpretation of prophecy. And following him are Zerubbabel, leader of the first return from exile; Ezra, the priest scribe; diligent and resourceful Nehemiah, a very captain of industry for God; Esther, willing to sacrifice her comfort, even life itself, for the common good; Malachi with his pointed question, "Will a man rob God?"—and many others; each bringing before

the mind and impressing upon the heart lessons of continuing importance and incalculable value. I have heard many express themselves as having found real spiritual development in the study of these lessons—a statement in which I heartily join.

#### THE NEW BUILT ON THE OLD

And how important it is that we should know the Old Testament; for the Old Testament is the foundation upon which the New Testament is built. The writers of the Gospels do not rewrite the books of the law and the prophets—they assume a knowledge of all that has been written. Christ not only took it for granted that the Old Testament was understood, but specifically and unqualifiedly endorsed it. He quoted many passages with approval, and it was He who said:

"Search the scriptures . . . they are they which testify of me."

Some four hundred years elapse between the writings of Malachi, which close the Old Testament, and the beginning of the Christian era. There seems to have been no event of importance to report during these years. The Children of Israel passed from under the rule of one king to the rule of another, preserving their race blood, their race characteristics and the religion of the race in spite of changes in temporal sovereigns.

Then, the silence of four centuries was broken by the events we are about to study. Out of the Jewish races came the Messiah so long waited for. The stage was set for the greatest event in history and a new group of characters absorb attention. The history about to be written is linked indissolubly to the old, but it is alive with a quickened spirit.

#### A SHARE IN THE GLORY OF JESUS

Modern Jewish thought puts the accent on the fact that Jesus was a Jew; some writers of the present day claim for the Children of Israel a share in the glory with which the world has crowned Jesus. H. G. Enelow, in his book entitled, "A Jewish View of Jesus," says:

"Who can compute all that Jesus has meant to humanity? The love He has inspired, the solace He has given, the good He has engendered, the hope and joy He has kindled—all that is unequalled in human history.

"Among the great and good that the human race has produced, none has even approached Jesus in universality of appeal and sway. He has become the most fascinating figure in history. In Him is combined what is best and most enchanting and most mysterious in Israel—the eternal people whose child He was.

"The Jew cannot help glorying in what Jesus thus has meant to the world; nor can he help hoping that Jesus may yet serve as a bond of union between Jew and Christian, once His teaching is better known and the bane of misunderstanding is at last removed from His words and His ideal."

This is as complimentary a view as one of the Jewish faith could be expected to take of one whose Messiahship they do not concede.

#### THE GROWING FIGURE OF ALL TIME

When in Jerusalem, I visited the walls of the Temple of Solomon to witness the wailing of the Jews that takes place there periodically. It was inspiring to note the evidences of sincere devotion, and yet pathetic to see the mourners forgetful of the vital part that their people had played in bringing Christianity into the world. The influence of the Old Testament is no longer confined to a chosen people; it is the heritage of all Christendom. A child of Abraham—a son of David, tracing his lineage through Mary. His virgin mother—has become the great fact of history and the growing figure of all time.

In succeeding Talks we shall gather the fruits that the new dispensation has produced, but we shall gather them from a tree whose roots drew nourishment from Old Testament soil.

And as we gather these fruits we can say with the full heart of the Psalmist:

"The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

One of the best known musicians makes the claim that the popular song writers steal their stuff from the composers of the classics and are able to get away with it because so few of the general public know anything about classical music. No music, as we understand it, is entitled to be called classical until after its composer has been dead fifty years, a situation that makes it impossible for a classical composer to get as mad as he would have just cause for being when charged with responsibility for the jazz of today.