

A STATESMAN ON HIS KNEES

The International Sunday School Lesson For November 11 Is "Nehemiah's Prayer." Neh, Ch. 1

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

These are the times of widened vision, with the whole world coming daily under review by all of us and the welfare of far-separated parts extricably bound up with one another. It is easier now than it was five years ago to understand this patriot Nehemiah, who, in comfort and affluence and honor himself, yet wept soul-tears for his people and for the city of his fathers. Go to any Zionist meeting today—and there are plenty of them—and the Nehemiah spirit will be found still alive and active.

With all the woe that it has wrought upon the earth, this war has also brought many boons, not the least of them being a passion for large patriotism. Rich and poor, wise and illiterate, are vying with each other to do service for the nation in its hour of need. In all time there has never been such a lavish dedication of life to great ends as has been witnessed during the past three years. A few days ago I saw a Russian general, who was traveling on the same train as myself, and whom I had mentally appraised as a fop and a martinet of the old regime, go weeping into his compartment, upon receipt of the news of the retreat of the Russian army. He would not eat or talk; his patriotism was so real and deep that it mastered all other emotions.

Petty purposes perish in a passion of patriotism. The Nehemiah spirit is exemplified in every part of the land and of the world. There is something sanctifying about true patriotism. It lifts men out of their littleness and selfishness, and makes them rejoice to do any sacrifice or service. Personal ambitions are given up, and food and profits and personal aggrandizement are forgotten. This in part explains the socializing influence of the present war, in Great Britain and elsewhere. Patriotism has lifted life up to a higher plane, even as it made a hero and a statesman out of the courtier Nehemiah. It was a God-lighted flame of pa-

triotism that burned in Nehemiah's breast. The old Jews, as we see clearly from the Psalms, associated God and country in all their holiest thoughts and noblest aspirations. Nehemiah, like the psalmist, loved Jerusalem above his chief joy. Hearth-fires are altar-fires. It is a mission of religion—and one who is wandering in far lands wonders how the Church at home is living up to this imperative duty—to keep strong and vital the ties that unite love of country with loyalty to God. Back of all allegiance to land should pulse that living spirit of religion which made Nehemiah a great patriot. The most popular of modern poets has breathed this spirit of place loyalty into his poem about Sussex:

"God gives all men all earth to love, But, since our hearts are small, Ordains for each one spot shall prove Beloved over all. Each to his choice, but I rejoice, The lot has fallen to me In a fair land, a fair land, In Sussex by the sea."

No greater peril besets society today with its intensified social conscience and its passion for humanity, than the so-called "internationalism," which professes to have no country save the world. Unthinking sentimentalists who have not discerned how the particular is always essential to make the general effective, decry patriotism as something they cannot see that it is necessary to love the whole by means of loyalty to a part. The best thing any of the home in general, for example, is to make his own home happy and wholesome. The finest service any woman can render the cause of womanhood elsewhere is by living a sweet and beautiful and noble life herself. And we do most for the cause of democracy in China and Russia and even in Germany when we stand steady and strong for the ideals of democracy in our own beloved land.

There "internationalists," who do not understand what loyalty means, and who wrought such hurt in Russia, are usually of the same group property rights, but in communion, in which everybody will get and nobody will give or sacrifice. In short, sentiment without sense, like love without loyalty, is capable of more

harm than good. No "internationalist" was Nehemiah, but a passionate patriot, and God blessed him in it.

Some Things That Have Passed In the background of this romantic oriental story we see the Persian monarch, a despot. All of Nehemiah's ambition was dependent, humbly speaking, upon the will of a king. I am writing this Lesson while sailing down the Volga, whose waters flow to the shores of Nehemiah's Persia, whither I also am bound; and all about me I have been seeing, for weeks past, the tokens of what one man's power could do. It needed the fall of the czar and of the Russian autocracy to make clear what absolute power means. In the church as in the state, one weak man's word was supreme. Out of this grew the evils that now afflict Russia; but the present ferment is more to be desired than the apparent smoothness of the old order.

Jerusalem, the city for which Nehemiah prayed, stood for the opposite thing. It was the mother of Democracies. The first real democracy was among the Jews. They will come to power once more in the Land of Promise, if at all, by the principle of democracy; that is, by the votes of the people of Palestine, after the Jews have settled in the Holy Land in sufficient numbers to give them control of the situation. It is unthinkable that the Syrians who have lived on the land for thousands of years, should be dispossessed, against their will, even to make way for Zionism. There is no Antaxarxes of earth today to accomplish by decree, as of old, the great desire of the Jews, which burns in so many myriad breasts.

Soul-Photographs on Faces Sometimes I have wished to conduct a woman's column in a great newspaper, for the one and singular purpose of saying over and over again to young women, by all the diversity of forms that I could command, this fundamental truth, that the soul photographs itself upon the face. There is no cosmetic like beautiful and unselfish thoughts. As a woman thinketh in her heart, so is she on her face. If you are lovely within, God will set His angels to work at painting that loveliness on your eyes and on your lips and cheeks. This is an eternal law. Would that all of us might learn it before it is too late.

By that law, Nehemiah's spirit showed itself upon his features. If you pray hard, your face will show it. If you are pretty and selfish and suspicious and mean, that, too, will show upon your face, as plainly as an automobile advertisement in a newspaper. Life's dominant desires cannot be hid. If I had to have the face of many a millionaire along with his money, I would prefer to do without the money. Nehemiah's solicitude for Jerusalem was apparent to the king upon his throne. Thereby his prayer was answered.

Some of us have never wanted any thing in the world so greatly as Nehemiah wanted the restoration of Jerusalem. Such are to be pitted. They have merely wanted good times, and automobiles and summer trips and the gratification of whims; and so they have never really lived. When we want any great boon earnestly, then we think of it always in prayerful fashion. Millions of mothers are thinking Godward thoughts of their sons today, and sweethearts dream prayers of lovers, because of the dangers of battle and camp. No great soul can refrain from praying in time of lofty desire. All our best aspirations are inextricably bound up with thoughts of God. As we see sad-faced Nehemiah standing before the Persian monarch, we are admonished to let all our trouble be big ones, at least of Jerusalem size. Souls are made great by the size of their concerns. Love of country, solicitude for the welfare of others than self, sorrow and work in behalf of the poor, a burning zeal for justice—these, and their like, are the anxieties that exalt while yet they weigh down.

The Man Who Prayed in a Hurry Two great passions flowed together to make up the solicitude that wrote itself on the face of Nehemiah. One was filial piety. Jerusalem was the city of his fathers and of their graves. Our western world does not fully apprehend the length to which respect for parents goes in the East. Perhaps the interchange of ideals which this fluid time is effecting may help us in this respect. The other great desire of Nehemiah was patriotic. His love for his native land, like that of our own people at the present time, was an overmastering passion. So possessed was he by these ideals that the king read them on his face, and inquired the reason for the unwonted sadness.

That was a critical moment for Nehemiah. It is dangerous to attract the especial attention of despots. Men who serve kings are expected to smile. So Nehemiah, we are told, prayed. This was not the long, fine, formal prayer about which we studied last week. It was an ejaculatory prayer, such as perhaps a teacher of grammar could not parse. It shot straight out of the heart to heaven. As Moody used to say, it went to heaven so fast that the devil had no time to interfere with it. Peter prayed the same sort of prayer to Jesus when he was singing an Alleluia; there was no time for ornate petitions then. Zacheus prayed the same fashion. As if such petitions are particularly popular with God, because of their clear sincerity, they are quickly answered. Blessings continue as they originate, by prayer. Perhaps that is what the apostle meant by the injunction to be instant in prayer.

A Chance to Do the Hard Thing There were courtiers not a few about the Persian court who would have saved Nehemiah the opportunity which came when the king asked him what he desired. They wanted jobs for themselves, and for their wives and relatives. But Nehemiah sought only a hard thing for himself, and a great boon for his people. He reminds us of the college-bred lad who, when he comes to a governor's office, asks for a job in the aviation service. He wanted to go to Jerusalem, and investigate the plight of the city, and of the remnant who remained there. That was no small journey, as the British prisoners from Kut el Amara, which is not far from the ancient Persian palace, can testify; as can the case of Nehemiah, the letters of ease, and the meeting of obstacles and enemies. Old Xenophon led the Ten Thousand over part of the same route. Also it meant a large military escort, and materials for rebuilding. Verily, Nehemiah, you asked largely when you did ask, "that is the way to go to a king." "Who ever goes to God for porridge should carry a large bowl," said old John Bunyan.

Letters for the journey were asked. It was on this very route covered by Nehemiah that I arrived one evening in the town of Sevevek, to spend the night. I called on the governor with a letter from the Sublime Porte, and straightway they wanted to throw out of the best room in the inn a guest already established, because of the letter I bore. In the East the recipient of such a letter will sometimes touch it to his head, in token of loyalty and esteem. In the case of Nehemiah, the letters did the work, as he set out to Jerusalem. He was aided on the way, and succeeded in his mission. His prayer had been answered—by way of his own interest and endeavor. How God delights to answer our prayers on our own feet!



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