AT THE TABERNACLE.

THE ICHTHYOLOGY AND OTHER NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BIBLE.

Dr. Talmage Gives an Account of His Breakfast by the Sea of Galilee and Deduces Many Lessons From the Mention of Fish In the Bible.

BROOKLYN, Feb. 5.—Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage this morning preached to a great audience in the Tabernacle a remarkably interesting and eloquent sermon on "The Ichthyology of the Bible; or, God Among the Fishes," being a continuation of his series of discourses on God everywhere. The text chosen was Genesis i, 20, "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that hath life."

What a new book the Bible is! After 36 years' preaching from it and discussing over 3,000 different subjects founded on the word of God the book is as fresh to me as when I learned, with a stretch of infantile memory, the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept," and I opened a few weeks ago a new realm of Biblical interest that neither my pulpit nor any one else's had ever explored, and having spoken to you in this course of sermons on God everywhere concerning the "Astronomy of the Bible; or, God Among the Stars;" the "Chronology of the Bible; or, God Among the Centuries;" the "Ornithology of the Bible; or, God Among the Birds;" the "Mineralogy of the Bible; or, God Among the Amethysts," this morning, as I may be divinely helped, I will speak to you about the "Ichthyology of the Bible; or, God Among the Fishes."

THE SEA OF MANY NAMES.

Our horses were lathered and tired out, and their fetlocks were red with the blood cut out by the rocks, and I could hardly get my feet out of the stirrups as on Saturday night we dismounted on the beach of Lake Galilee. The rather liberal supply of food with which we had started from Jerusalem was well nigh exhausted, and the articles of diet remaining had, by oft repetition three times a day for three weeks, ceased to appetize. I never want to see a fig again, and dates with me are all out of date.

For several days the Arab caterer, who could speak but half a dozen English words, would answer our requests for some of the styles of food with which we had been delectated the first few days by crying out, "Finished." The most piquant appetizer is abstinence, and the demand of all the party was, "Let us breakfast on Sunday morning on fresh fish from Lake Gennesareth," for you must know that that lake has four names, and it is worth a profusion of nomenclature, and it is in the Bible called Chinnereth, Tiberias, Gennesareth and Galilee.

To our extemporized table on Sabbath morning came broiled perch, only a few hours before lifted out of the sacred waters. It was natural that our minds should revert to the only breakfast that Christ ever prepared, and it was on those very shores where we breakfasted. Christ had in those olden times struck two flints together and set on fire some shavings or light brushwood and then put on larger wood, and a pile of glowing bright coals was the consequence.

Meanwhile the disciples fishing on the lake had awfully "poor luck," and every time they drew up the net it hung dripping without a fluttering fin or squirming scale. But Christ from the shore shouted to them and told them where to drop the net, and 153 big fish rewarded them. Simon and Nathaniel, having cleaned some of those large fish, brought them to the coals which Christ had kindled, and the group who had been out all night and were chill and wet and hungry sat down and began mastication. All that scene came back to us when on Sabbath morning, December, 1889, just outside the ruins of ancient Tiberias and within sound of the rippling Galilee, we breakfasted.

FISHING A GREAT BIBLE TOPIC.

Now, is it not strange that the Bible imagery is so inwrought from the fisheries when the Holy Land is, for the most part, an inland region? Only three lakes, two besides the one already mentioned—namely, the Dead sea, where fish cannot live at all, and as soon as they touch it they die, and the birds swoop on their tiny carcasses, and the third, the Pools of Heshbon, which are alternately full and dry. Only three rivers of the Holy Land, Jabbok, Kishon and Jordan. About all the fish now in the waters of the Holy Land are the perch, the carp, the bream, the minnow, the blenny, the barbel (so called because of the barb at its mouth), the chub, the dogfish, none of them worth a Delaware shad or an Adirondack trout.

Well, the world's geography has changed, and the world's bill of fare has changed. Lake Galilee was larger and deeper and better stocked than now, and no doubt the rivers were deeper and the fisheries were of far more importance then than now. Besides that there was the Mediterranean sea only 35 miles away, and fish were salted or dried and brought inland, and so much of that article of food was sold in Jerusalem that a fish market gave the name to one of the gates of Jerusalem near by, and it was called the fish gate.

The cities had great reservoirs in which the fish were kept alive and bred. The Pool of Gibeon was a fishpool. Isaiah and Solomon refer to fishpools. Large fish were kept alive and tied fast by ropes to a stake in these reservoirs, a ring having been run through their gills, and that is the meaning of the Scripture passage which says, "Canst thou put a hook into his nose or bore his jaw through with a thorn?"

So important was the fish that the god Dagon, worshiped by the Philistines, was made half fish and half man, and that is the meaning of the Lord's indignation when in I Samuel we read that this Dagon, the fish god, stood beside the ark of the Lord, and Dagon was by invisible hands dashed to pieces because the Philistines had dared to make the fish a god. That explains the Scripture passage, "The head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him." Now, the stump of Dagon was the fish part. The top part, which was the figure of a man, was dashed to pieces, and the Lord, by demolishing everything but the stump or fish part of the idol, practically said, "You may keep your fish, but know from the way I have demolished the rest of the idol that it is nothing divine."

THE FISH CAME BEFORE THE LAND ANIMALS.

Layard and Wilkinson found the fish an object of idolatry all through Assyria and Egypt. The Nile was full of fish, and that explains the horrors of the plague that slaughtered the finny tribe all up and down that river, which has been and is now the main artery of Egypt's life. In Job you hear the plunge of the spear into the hippopotamus as the great dramatic poet cries out, "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons or his head with fish spears?" Yea, the fish began to swim in the very first book of Genesis, where my text records, "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life."

Do you realize that the first living thing that God created was the fish? It preceded the bird, the quadruped, the human race. The fish has priority of residence over every living thing. The next thing done after God had kindled for our world the golden chandelier of the sun and the silver chandelier of the moon was to make the fish. The first motion of the principle of life, a principle that all the thousands of years since have not been able to define or analyze, the very first stir of life, was in a fish.

What an hour that was when in the Euphrates, the Gihon, the Pison and the Hiddekel, the four rivers of paradise, the waters swirled with fins and brightened with scales! All the attributes of the infinite God were called into action for the making of that first fish. Lanceolate and translucent miracle! There is enough wonder in the plate of a sturgeon or in the cartilage of a shark to confound the scientists. It does not take the universe to prove a God. A fish does it.

No wonder that Linnæus and Cuvier and Agassiz and the greatest minds of all the centuries sat enraptured before its anatomy. Oh, its beauty and the adaptedness of structure to the element in which it must live; the picture gallery on the sides of the mountain trout unveiled as they spring up to snatch the flies; the grayling, called the flower of fishes; the salmon, ascending the Oregon and the Severn, easily leaping the falls that would stop them; the bold perch, the gudgeon, silver and black spotted; the herring, moving in squadrons five miles long; the carp, for cunning called the fox of fishes; the wondrous sturgeons, formerly reserved for the tables of royal families and the isinglass made out of their membrane; the tench, called the physician of fishes, because when applied to human ailments it is said to be curative; the lampreys, so tempting to the epicurean that too many of them slew Henry II—aye, the whole world of fishes!

Enough of them floating up and down the rivers to feed the hemispheres if every ear of corn and every head of wheat and every herd of quadruped and if every other article of food in all the earth were destroyed. Universal drought, leaving not so much as a spear of grass on the round planet, would leave in the rivers and lakes and seas for the human race a staple commodity of food which, if brought to shore, would be enough not only to feed but fatten the entire human race. In times to come the world may be so populated that the harvests and vineyards and land animals may be insufficient to feed the human family, and the nations may be obliged to come to the rivers and ocean beaches to seek the living harvests that swim the deep, and that would mean more health and vigor and brilliancy and brain than the human race now own.

FISH FOOD MAKES STRONG MEN.

The Lord by placing the fish in the first course of the menu in paradise, making it precede bird and beast, indicated to the world the importance of the fish as an article of human food. The reason that men and women lived three and four and five and nine hundred years was because they were kept on parched corn and fish. We mix up a fantastic food that kills the most of us before 50 years of age. Custards and whipped syllabubs and Roman punches and chicken salads at midnight are a gantlet that few have strength to run.

We put on many a tombstone glowing epithets saying that the person beneath died of patriotic services or from exhaustion in religious work, when nothing killed the poor fellow but lobster eaten at a party four hours after he ought to have been sound asleep in bed. There are men today in our streets so many walking hospitals who might have been athletes if they had taken the hint of Genesis in my text and of our Lord's remark and adhered to simplicity of diet.

The reason that the country districts have furnished most of the men and women of our time who are doing the mightiest work in merchandise, in mechanics, in law, in medicine, in theology, in legislative and congressional halls, and all the presidents from Washington down—at least those who have amounted to anything—is because they were in those country districts of necessity kept on plain diet. No man or woman ever amounted to anything who was brought up on floating island or angel cake. The world must turn back to paradisiac diet if it is to get paradisiac morals and paradisiac health. The human race today needs more phosphorus, and the fish is charged and surcharged with phosphorus—phosphorus, that which shines in the dark without burning.

THE APOSTOLIC FISHERMEN.

What made the 12 apostles such stalwart men that they could endure anything and achieve everything? Next to divine inspiration, it was because they were nearly all fishermen and lived on fish and a few plain condiments. Paul, though not brought up to swing the net and throw the line, must of necessity have adopted the diet of the population among whom he lived, and you see the phosphorus in his daring plea before Felix, and the phosphorus in his boldness of all utterances before the wiseacres on Mars hill, and the phosphorus as he went without fright to his beheading, and the phosphorus you see in the lives of all the apostles who moved right on undaunted to certain martyrdom, whether to be decapitated or flung off precipices or hung in crucifixion. Phosphorus shining in the dark without burning.

No man or woman that ever lived was independent of questions of diet. Let those who by circumstances are compelled to simplicity of diet thank God for their rescue from the temptation of killing delicacies. The men and women who are to decide the drift of the 20th century, which is only seven or eight steps off, are now five miles back from the rail station and had for breakfast this morning a similar bill of fare to that which Christ provided for the fishermen disciples on the banks of Lake Galilee.

Indeed the only articles of food that Christ by miracle multiplied were bread and fish which the boy who acted as sutler to the 7,000 people of the wilderness handed over—five barley loaves and two fishes. The boy must have felt badly when called on to give up the two fishes which he had brought out after having caught them himself, sitting with his bare feet over the bank of the lake and expecting to sell his supply at good profit, but he felt better when by the miracle the fish were multiplied and he had more returned to him than he had surrendered.

THE ANCIENT MONSTERS.

Know also in order to understand the ichthyology of the Bible that in the deeper waters, as those of the Mediterranean, there were monsters that are now extinct. The fools who become infidels because they cannot understand the engulfment of the recreant Jonah in a sea monster might have saved their souls by studying a little natural history. "Oh," says some one, "that story of Jonah was only a fable." Say others, "It was interpolated by some writer of later times." Others say, "It was a reproduction of the story of Hercules devoured and then restored from the monster." But my reply is that history tells us that there were monsters large enough to whelm ships.

The extinct ichthyosaurus of other ages was 30 feet long, and as late as the sixth century of the Christian era up and down the Mediterranean there floated monsters compared with which a modern whale was a sardine or a herring. The shark has again and again been found to have swallowed a man entire. A fisherman on the coast of Turkey found a sea monster which contained a woman and a purse of gold.

I have seen in museums sea monsters large enough to take down a prophet. But I have a better reason for believing the Old Testament account, and that is that Christ said it was true and a type of his own resurrection, and I suppose he ought to know. In Matthew xii, 40, Jesus Christ says, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." And that settles it for me and for any man who does not believe Christ a dupe and an imposter.

Notice also how the Old Testament writers drew similitude from the fisheries. Jeremiah uses such imagery to prophesy destruction, "Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them." Ezekiel uses fish imagery to prophesy prosperity, "It shall come to pass that the fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even to En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many," the explanation of which is that En-gedi and En-eglaim stood on the banks of the Dead sea, in the waters of which no fish can live, but the prophet says that the time will come when these waters will be regenerated and they will be great places for fish.

Amos reproves idolatries by saying, "The day shall come upon you when he will take you away with hooks and your posterity with fishhooks." Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, declares that those captured of temptation are as fishes taken in an evil net. Indeed Solomon knew all about the finny tribe and wrote a treatise on ichthyology which has been lost.

HOW ST. PETER FISHED.

Furthermore, in order that you may understand the ichthyology of the Bible you must know that there were five ways of fishing. One was by a fence of reeds and canes, within which the fish were caught. But the Herodic government forbade that on Lake Galilee, lest pleasure boats be wrecked by the stakes driven. Another mode was by spearing—the waters of Galilee so clear, good aim could be taken for the transfixing. Another was by hook and line, as where Isaiah says, "The fishers also shall mourn, and they that cast angle into the brook shall lament." And Job says, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" And Habakkuk says, "They take up all of them with the angle."

Another mode was by a casting net or that which was flung from the shore; another, by a dragnet or that which was thrown from a boat and drawn through the sea as the fishing smack sailed on. How wonderful all this is inwrought into the Bible imagery, and it leads me to ask in which mode are you and I fishing, for the church is the boat, and the gospel is the net, and the sea is the world, and the fish are the souls, and God addresses us as he did Simon and Andrew, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishes of men." But when is the best time to fish for souls? In the night. Peter, why did you say to Christ, "We have toiled all the night and have taken nothing?" Why did you not fish in the daytime? He replies, "You ought to know that the night is the best time for fishing."

At Tobyhanna Mills, among the mountains of Pennsylvania, I saw a friend with high boots and fishing tackle starting out at 9 o'clock at night, and I said, "Where are you going?" He answered, "Going to fish." "What, in the night?" He answered, "Yes, in the night." So the vast majority of souls captured for God are taken in times of revival in the night meetings. They might just as well come at 12 o'clock at noon, but most of them will not. Ask the evangelists of olden times, ask Finney, ask Nettleton, ask Osborn, ask Daniel Baker, and then ask all the modern evangelists which is the best time to gather souls, and they will answer, "The night; by all odds, the night." Not only the natural night, but the night of trouble.

Suppose I go around in this audience and ask these Christians when they were converted to God. One would answer, "It was at the time I lost my child by membranous croup, and it was the night of bereavement," or the answer would be, "It was just after I was swindled out of my property, and it was the night of bankruptcy," or it would be, "It was during that time when I was down with that awful sickness, and it was the night of physical suffering," or it would be, "It was that time when slander took after me, and I was maligned and abused, and it was the night of persecution." Ah, my hearers, that is the time for you to go after souls, when a night of trouble is on them. Miss not that opportunity to save a soul, for it is the best of all opportunities.

Go up along the Mohawk, or the Juniata, or the Delaware, or the Tombigbee, or the St. Lawrence right after a rain, and you will find the fishermen all up and down the banks. Why? Because a good time to angle is right after the rain, and that is a good time to catch souls, right after a shower of misfortune, right after floods of disaster. And as a pool overshadowed with trees is a grand place for making a fine haul of fish, so when the soul is under the long dark shadows of anxiety and distress it is a good time to make a spiritual haul. People in the bright sunshine of prosperity are not so easily taken.

RICHES OF THE BIBLE.

But be sure before you start out to the gospel fisheries to get the right kind of bait. "But how," you say, "am I to get it?" My answer is, "Dig for it." "Where shall I dig for it?" "In the rich Bible grounds." We boys brought up in the country had to dig for bait before we started for the banks of the Raritan. We put the sharp edge of the spade against the ground and then put our foot on the spade, and with one tremendous plunge of our strength of body and will we drove it in up to the handle and then turned over the sod.

We had never read Walton's "Complete Angler" or Charles Cotton's "Instructions How to Angle For Grayling In a Clear Stream." We knew nothing about the modern red hackle or the fly of orange colored mohair, but we got the right kind of bait. No use trying to angle for fish or angle for souls unless you have the right kind of bait, and there is plenty of it in the promises, the parables, the miracles, the crucifixion, the heaven of the grand old gospel. Yes, not only must you dig for bait, but use only fresh bait. You cannot do anything down at the pond with old angleworms. New views of truth. New views of God. New views of the soul. There are all the good books to help you dig.

But make up your mind as to whether you will take the hint of Habakkuk and Isaiah and Job and use hook and line, or take the hint of Matthew and Luke and Christ and fish with a net. I think many lose their time by wanting to fish with a net, and they never get a place to swing the net. In other words, they want to do gospel work on a big scale, or they will not do it at all.

I see feeble minded Christian men going around with a Bagster's Bible under their arm, hoping to do the work of an evangelist and use the net, while they might be better content with hook and line and take one soul at a time. They are bad failures as evangelists; they would be mighty successes as private Christians. If you catch only one soul for God, that will be enough to fill your eternity with celebration. All hail the fisherman with hook and line!

I have seen a man in roughest corduroy outfit come back from the woods loaded down with a string of finny treasures hung over his shoulder, and his gamebag filled, and a dog with his teeth carrying a basket filled with the surplus of an afternoon's angling, and it was all the result of a hook and line. And in the eternal world there will be many a man and many a woman that was never heard of outside of a village Sunday school or a prayer meeting buried in a church basement who will come before the throne of God with a multitude of souls ransomed through his or her instrumentality, and yet the work all done through personal interview, one by one, one by one.

You do not know who that one soul may be. Staupitz helped one soul into the light, but it was Martin Luther. Thomas Bilney brought salvation to one soul, but it was Hugh Latimer. An edge tool maker was the means of saving one soul, but it was John Summerfield. Our blessed Lord healed one blind eye at a time, one paralyzed arm at a time, one dropsical patient at a time, and raised from the dead one girl at a time, one young man at a time. Admire the net that takes in a great many at once, but do not despise the hook and line.

IN THE GOSPEL FISHERIES.

God help us amid the gospel fisheries whether we employ hook or net, for the day cometh when we shall see how much depended on our fidelity. Christ himself declared: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good in the vessel but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world—the angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from the just."

Yes, the fishermen think it best to keep the useful and worthless of the haul in the same net until it is drawn upon the beach, and then the division takes place, and if it is on Long Island coast the mossbankers are thrown out and the bluefish and shad preserved, or if it is on the shore of Galilee the fish classified as siluroids are hurled back into the water or thrown up on the bank as unclean, while the perch and the carp and the barbel are put into pails to be carried home for use.

So in the church on earth, the saints and the hypocrites, the generous and the mean, the chaste and the unclean, are kept in the same membership, but at death the division will be made, and the good will be gathered into heaven, and the bad, however many holy communions they may have celebrated, and however many rhetorical prayers they may have offered, and however many years their names may have been on the church rolls, will be cast away. God forbid that any of us should be among the "cast away!" But may we do our work, whether small or great, as thoroughly as did that renowned fisherman, George W. Bethune, who spent his summer rest angling in the waters around the Thousand Isles and beating at their own craft those who plied it all the year, and who the rest of the time gloriously preached Christ in a pulpit only 15 minutes from where I now stand, and ordering for his own obsequies: "Put on me my pulpit gown and bands, with my own pocket Bible in my right hand. Bury me with my mother, my father and my grandmother. Sing also my own hymn:

"Jesus, thou prince of life!
Thy chosen cannot die;
Like thee, they conquer in the strife,
To reign with thee on high."

A Woman's Exchange.

She had her ivory tablets out and consulted them busily as she rode up town in a State street car.

"There's Aunt Julo," she remarked. "She gave us that chocolate set last year. We must give her something as nice as this. And, oh, Ned! That lovely etching Dick Brown sent us—we've never done anything for him. Suppose I make him a cushion for his apartments and invite him to dinner? That would make it about even. And there's Flossie. She gave me a ridiculous glove mending thing last year. I must have twenty of those objects about. Well, I'm glad it was a cheap gift, for now I'll not have to give her anything expensive. A button bag will do. And, Ned, what on earth does this mean? Evergreens, tinsel, gold stars. Oh, yes! They've put me on the church decorating committee, and I simply haven't the time. However, that Mrs. Lewis can do all the work. Ned, what are you laughing at?"

A smile of vast proportions and unseemingly scorn had appeared upon Ned's face.

"Well," said he slowly, "I was just thinking that at last I have learned what a 'woman's exchange' is. It's the balancing of Christmas presents from year to year."

And three men beamed approval upon Ned, while his wife retired with silent contempt to her tablets again, and the other women who overheard seemed divided between a desire to wither the overwise Ned and a longing to annihilate the woman who had thus ruthlessly betrayed the secrets of her sex.—Chicago Times.

A Story of Devotion.

They sat late by the flickering firelight.
Her head was nestled on his heaving and manly bosom, and softly his arm stole round her yielding waist.
The law takes no cognizance of this class of stealing.
Nobody does, if proper precautions are observed, except the two interested parties
Oh, love!
Oh, rapture!
He had told her the sweet words over and over again, and she had coyly cooed them back to him.
A step was heard in the hall.
That is to say, it was heard by the girl.
The young man heard nothing except the beating of a fond heart.
"George," she murmured, "what would you do to show your love for your little Ethelrida?"
"Dearest," he responded fervently, "anything, everything. I would willingly, oh, so willingly, suffer any pain for you."
"Are you sure, George?" she asked, with the insistence of doubt.
"Sure as the stars do shine, darling."
Again that step.
"Then, George," she said, with a little sob, "get ready, for papa's coming."
And the craven coward skipped.—Detroit Free Press.

THE HEMLOCK OF SOCRATES.

What cup from any vintage of the earth,
Purple or red or golden, brimming bright
The glass with bubbles of imprisoned light;
What cooling draft set to the lips of death;

What deepest drink of passion or of mirth;
What potent liquor full of pungent might
To send the whole earth reeling on the sight
And transmute common clay to priceless worth;

Which of all drinks the earth has known, O seer,
Were worthy to be named with thine, in sooth,
When thou didst quaff the hemlock's bitter cheer?

O Socrates, thou needest not men's ruth;
Looking adown all time with vision clear,
And drinking death itself in pledge of truth!
—Arlo Bates in Youth's Companion.

A Clerk's Opinion.

Clerk Louis McCleery, of the lower board of the general council, is of the opinion that the happiest moment of a man's life is when he is pulled out of bed at 2 o'clock in the morning by a lot of little barefooted tots in their night clothes who have just emptied the gifts of Santa Claus from their little stockings, and who want to show their treasures. He warms to his subject and grows enthusiastic as he proceeds with his glowing reminiscences. "Ah, they are little angels," he says. "They know nothing of this stormy world. The house is their kingdom, and the little despots rule. One dollar judiciously invested on Christmas eve will bring more pleasure to a sweet little child than the wealth of a Vanderbilt could purchase a few years later."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

When Women Invest.

When you make investments of your little savings, look about you on all sides and find out for yourself where it is wise to put your money. Do not trust anybody implicitly. Women often lose their money through sheer laziness in finding out what sort of risks they are taking. Naturally nobody is as much interested in your affairs as you are. Do not expect, therefore, that anybody else will take trouble for you that you are unwilling to take for yourself. —St. Louis Star-Sayings.

Raphael's "St. Cecilia."

St. Cecilia has long been a favorite subject for painters. The accepted patroness of music, her personality appeals in a special manner to the artist, and to reproduce her features has been the dream of many an ambitious artist. The painter or sculptor in portraying his subject simply gives tangible form to the creature of his imagination. This is true of Raphael's "St. Cecilia."—Jewelers' Weekly.

She Calls Him Lycurgus.

A New York lady recently employed a colored boy as a man of all work whose name was Lycurgus Jones. "Lycurgus is a rather long name," she said to him, "suppose I call you Gus for short." "I'ze don't likes nicknames," he replied; "'if you don't likes Lycurgus you kin call me Jonesy." She calls him Lycurgus.—Ex change.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.

LESSON VII, FIRST QUARTER, INTERNATIONAL SERIES, FEB. 12.

Text of the Lesson, Neh. i, 1-11—Memory Verses, 8, 9—Golden Text, Ps. xxx, 10—Commentary by the Rev. D. M. Stearns.

1. "The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah." Nehemiah (comforted of Jehovah) was one of the Jewish captives selected by Artaxerxes, the Persian monarch, to fill the office of cupbearer. He arrived at Jerusalem about thirteen years after Ezra was governor of Judea, remaining about twelve years, and then returning to Artaxerxes, from whom he received a new commission. He went again to Jerusalem and ruled there for another twenty-two years, B. C. 445-428. He was one of the greatest men of the Hebrew nation, renowned for his zeal, patriotism, courage, humanity and earnest devotedness to God and to His service ("Searching the Scriptures," by Dr. Anderson). One of the most interesting things in the book is the edict to rebuild the city (chapter ii, 5, 8), from which begins Daniel's seventy weeks.

2. "I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." The church of today seems not to appreciate the fact that Jerusalem was and is and shall yet be a city very dear to Jehovah, and more dear than we can understand to every loyal Jew. "The Lord hath chosen Zion. He hath desired it for his habitation." "The Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem." "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord" (Ps. cxxxii, 13; Zech. i, 17; Jer. iii, 17).

3. "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach." By comparing verse 1 and chapter ii, 1, with Ez. vii, 6, 7, we find that this desolation was the condition of things at the Holy City thirteen years after the great reformation wrought through Ezra, and we feel inclined to ask why it was so. With the temple finished, the worship restored and such purifying as Ezra had accomplished, why was there not more zeal for God? If one question can help to answer another we would ask, Why, with all the open doors of this generation to carry the Gospel to every creature and the vast amount of money in the hands of Christians, are there so many hundreds of millions still without the Gospel?

4. "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." Here is a man away off in Babylon so interested in the welfare of Jerusalem and in the honor of the God of Israel that for several days he gives himself up to mourning and fasting and praying. Compare Daniel fasting and praying for three full weeks that he might know the mind of God (Dan. x, 2, 3); see Paul three years at Ephesus, warning the people night and day with tears (Acts xx, 31), and remember that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. xi, 6).

5. "And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments." From here to the end of the lesson we have his prayer, and it is a prayer that was heard in heaven and answered. Observe that in chapter ii, 4, he one day prayed without uttering a word with his lips, for at the same moment he prayed to God and spake to the king. Compare this verse with chapter ix, 32, and Ex. xxxiv, 6, 7, and see in Jer. xxxii, 17, the comfort to be obtained from the God of heaven.

6. "I pray before Thee now day and night for the children of Israel, Thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel." Identifying himself with the nation, he confesses their sins. He excuses nothing, palliates nothing, but includes himself, saying, "Both I and my Father's house have sinned." "He that covereth His sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy" (Prov. xxviii, 13). If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John i, 9).

7. "We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments." The curses had come just as God had said in Deut. xxviii, 15, 45, and they had brought it all upon themselves (Isa. lix, 2). Nehemiah does well to make full confession; but, oh, think of Him who took all these sins upon Himself, who allowed all sin to be heaped upon Him, making it His own that He might give unto us His righteousness! This He does now for every individual believer (II Cor. v, 21; Acts xiii, 38, 39), and this He will yet do for Israel (Isa. lx, 21).

8. "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses." He reminds God of the curse which He by Moses had said should come, and which had come. He did not question the authorship of Moses, nor did he doubt that Moses spoke the words of God. He believed God, condemned himself and his people and justified God.

9. "But if ye turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them." He is quoting now in his prayer from Deut. xxx, 1-5, where Jehovah promised, on condition of true repentance and obedience, to restore them to their land and bless them and give them a heart to love Him supremely; but the condition was, "If thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. xxx, 10). As He chose Jerusalem to put His name there and magnify Himself from thence, so He chooses us to bear His name and magnify Him in these mortal bodies (Acts ix, 15, 16; Phil. i, 20).

10. "Now these are thy servants and thy people whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand." So pleaded Moses, reminding God that notwithstanding all their sin still they were His people and His inheritance which He brought out of Egypt (Deut. ix, 26, 29). So pleaded Daniel also as he identified himself with the sinful nation and asked mercy in these words, "O Lord, forgive for thine own sake, O my God, for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (Dan. ix, 15, 19). See what He will yet do for them for His name's sake in Ezek. xxxvi, 22-32.

11. "Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Having poured out his soul on behalf of his people, he now asks a special favor on his own behalf, and yet for their sakes as their benefactor. Every such intercessor, whether he be Abraham or Moses or Daniel or Nehemiah, suggests to us the great intercessor, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, lives for us and will in due time come again for us. He, for His name's sake, forgives our sins (I John ii, 12; Isa. xliii, 25), and tells us that whatsoever we shall ask in His name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, He will do it (John xiv, 13, 14).

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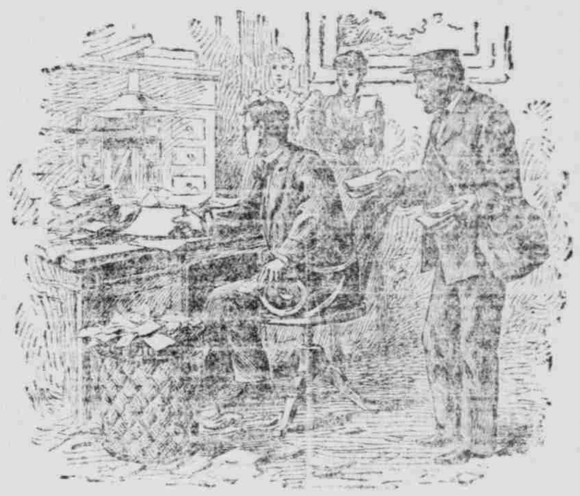

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