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preceded them, are said, if the margin of R.V. is correct, to "praise in the beauty of holiness," *i.e.* in holy attire. On the gain from adopting the margins at cxix. 128, there cannot be two opinions; and those at cxxxix. 20, cxlii. 5, well deserve attention. Much more might have been done by the Revisers; but that so much should have been done by a company, is matter for thankful surprise. At this distance of time from the completion of the task, it is not difficult to look upon the stately volumes of the Revision with a considerable degree of impartiality.

T. K. CHEYNE.

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### EZRA.

In the first six chapters of the book of Ezra some account is given of the fortunes of the Jews under Cyrus and Darius. Between the sixth and the seventh chapters a gap of sixty years is overleaped, and the narrative is resumed with an account of events in the reign of Artaxerxes, who acceded in the year 465 B.C. In the seventh year of this monarch's reign Ezra received from him the amplest commission to inquire into the affairs of the returned captives, and to make such regulations in their favour as might approve themselves to his judgment. Ezra was allowed to take with him to Jerusalem as many of his countrymen as chose to return. He was amply furnished with the means of journeying in comfort, and besides carried handsome gifts to the Temple. And to the imperial firman were added the remarkable words: "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" It has very naturally been suggested that in these words we may see an indication that Artaxerxes suspected that the troubles of the

early years of his reign had arisen from the anger of the God of the Jews. It is also to be considered that he was brought up in the household with his father's wife Esther, whose story must have been well known to him, and whose influence he may have felt.

Ezra with his little band set out from Babylon on the first day of Nisan or March (458 B.C.); and nine days after he halted and reviewed the people, and finding that there were no Levites among them he sent to a neighbouring town, and was speedily joined by thirty-eight or thirty-nine Levites and two hundred and twenty Nethinim. He then proclaimed a fast, that prayer might be made to God for a safe journey. They were to pass through a region infested with robbers and marauders, and to all such they offered, in the treasure they carried with them, an inviting prey. The natural course for Ezra to adopt would have been for him to ask from Artaxerxes a military escort for his caravan. But his own reason for declining to do so is good and indicative of his character. "I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way, for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek Him, for good; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him." Such consistency and courage are worthy of all honour: worthy of honour also is his fear of bringing reproach upon his God. He saw that want of faith on his part would cause the heathen to think meanly of his God—a result he could not bear to contemplate. The repute of Jehovah was more precious to him than the treasure he carried. He would rather risk the treasure than lower in men's minds their idea of God's power to protect His own.

In the management of difficult affairs a man's character quickly reveals itself. Ezra had in charge important material interests, the lives of many defenceless persons, and a considerable amount of property; but this did not dim his perception of the moral consequences of his actions. The hazards which would have shaken the nerve of a lesser man, and made him oblivious of everything else, did not disturb his mind or divert his attention from the finer issues of his conduct. Besides, he was a man of straightforward and consistent character. His convictions and his conduct were of a piece. Throughout his administration in Jerusalem the most striking feature is his repugnance to own a law verbally, and to deny it in his life. Here, in the first manifestation of his character, he exhibits the same thoroughgoing consistency.

The same keenness of perception and innate truthfulness are discernible in his account of the crowd who assembled at Jerusalem to hear his decision about their mixed marriages. "All the people," he says, "sat in the street trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain." The solemnity of the occasion did not prevent him from discriminating between a merely physical and a religious emotion. The earliest biographer of Julius Cæsar tells us that he liked to wear the laurel crown, which afterwards became distinctive of empire, partly because it was given him by his fellow citizens in recognition of service done, partly because it covered his baldness. Everywhere motives thus mingle. It is sometimes difficult to detect how much of our emotion is due to religious feeling, and how much to physical causes. It is difficult to know whether the tear that gathers in the eye while we pray or look upon suffering is due to nervous weakness or to strength of sympathy, whether our disinclination to certain amusements be due to heavenliness of mind or to moroseness of temper, whether our security from this or that common

vice be due to strength of will or to weakness of health, whether our indifference to applause or advancement in life is the fruit of a disappointed and soured spirit or of a spirit which is satisfied with a heavenly inheritance.

Ezra went to Jerusalem prepared to find much that would grieve and shock him, but he was thoroughly taken by surprise when informed by some of the influential men that mixed marriages had become common. The intense horror with which he viewed these marriages is remarkable. No doubt we must make allowance for what we consider oriental extravagance in the expression of feeling; but after all deduction an unusual degree of emotion remains, and is not easily explained. For although intermarriage with heathens had always been forbidden, the law had been so frequently and notoriously broken that it might well be considered obsolete. In one instance indeed something like Divine sanction had been given to such a marriage. When Boaz married Ruth, a Moabitish woman, she was honoured by becoming the ancestress of David and of the royal line terminating in Christ. On what principle then did Ezra thus abruptly resuscitate the law?

Probably he was influenced by the consideration that a practice which at one time and under certain circumstances may be legitimate and harmless becomes at another time and in other conditions wrong and hurtful. At no period of Jewish history could intermarriage with the heathen have been more dangerous to the nation than at this time, when they were few in numbers, and had little strength to maintain their distinctive belief and hopes. They had just returned from an exile to which they had been subjected on account of their assimilation to the heathen, and this renewed tendency to obliterate their distinctiveness seemed to Ezra an ominous weakness. Almost all he has to say therefore about his administration concerns these marriages.

The principle on which he acted is a sound one, and finds

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constant application in national affairs. More disastrous and threatening to all that we value in our nation than the vice with which Ezra contended is our national vice of drunkenness. This vice is notorious, it is shameful, it makes us the scorn of other nations and loathsome to ourselves. In dealing with it Ezra's principle must find application. But this principle, which certainly should be understood by all who take upon them to manage social matters, is wholly overlooked by those who plead that wine is furnished by God as one of the chief articles of human consumption, has been by common consent chosen as the symbol and accompaniment of joy, and was freely bestowed by our Lord Himself on his fellow guests. Such pleadings omit the consideration, that what is in ordinary circumstances allowable and laudable may in special circumstances be fraught with disaster and reprehensible in the extreme. Lively conversation and the loud mirth of children are good, but they are not encouraged in the room where a dying parent is trying to catch a few minutes' sleep. Paul denounced those who prohibited marriage, but none the less did he recognise that the uncertain and unsettled times in which he lived put marriage in the category of imprudences so far as he himself was concerned.

On the same principle we ought to consider "the present distress"; what it is becoming and commendable in a good citizen to do in view of the special circumstances of our time. We reap many advantages from being citizens of this country in this age, and it is a small return to make, if we find ourselves in one or two particulars restricted, to allow the restriction with grace and hopefulness. Certainly the man is wrong both in heart and judgment who shuts his eyes to the special wants of his time, and refuses in any respect to modify his own conduct in consideration of these wants. His conduct may be perfectly proper in the abstract, he may never exceed the bounds of temperance

in his use of intoxicants; but in reason and in justice he is bound to consider whether the present emergency does not call upon him to regulate his habits differently from the manner required by abstract right. If his neighbour is ill of a nervous fever, he does not persist that music is a good thing and he likes it; his natural sympathy makes it impossible for him in these circumstances to act as he ordinarily would. Does natural delicacy of feeling, does consideration for others, find no room for exercise where the well-being of so many is concerned? Are we to indulge in precisely the same habits as would be proper were society in a healthy condition? Are we prepared to say that there is no modification in our conduct that is either possible or required by the crying evil of our time, which every good citizen and every good Christian should be proud to have a hand in putting down?

But while a citizen of the rank and file has his own responsibilities, the burden a leader has to bear is heavy indeed. Ezra found it so. He found himself compelled to lead in dealing with a widespread vice with which many of the leading men were identified, and in endeavouring to eradicate which he would evoke opposition and hatred. This was a more serious affair than any he had bargained for in coming to Jerusalem. Like Esther, Ezra finds that prominent position carries incalculable hazards. We all find that coveted positions have unthought-of duties attached, and make calls upon our fortitude, our generosity, our capacity for sacrifice, which we little thought of when we entered them. Men are betrayed into much of the good they do. They accomplish good by the pressure of circumstances as much as by free intention. Ezra was too true a priest, too true a patriot, too true a man—whichever you please—to separate himself from his people and pursue his own comfortable and respectable way while they were living in sin. His sympathy with his

fellow citizens is shown in his dismay when he heard of the prevalent irregularity. He rent his garments, tore his hair, and sank involuntarily on the ground, unstrung and overwhelmed with grief. His spontaneous identification of himself with his people is further shown in the first words he uttered when, after sitting hours upon the ground, he rose to his knees and said, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." It was this involuntary and profound feeling for and with the people that compelled him to attempt the reformation, and that gave him power to carry it through. As usual in such cases his grief and concern stirred similar feelings in others, and gradually there gathered round him a few helpful men, a sufficient number of godly and patriotic spirits to cleanse the community. The bold resolve to compel separation in all mixed marriages was taken and was carried through.

Artists who have felt themselves equal to the task of portraying scenes in which are exhibited some of the keenest and most mingled feelings of human nature, have sometimes chosen Abraham's dismissal of Hagar and her child as a subject admitting of much delicacy and pathos in its treatment. There is, in the scenes which must have everywhere followed Ezra's decree, a wider field for the artist's power of setting before the eye the anguish of separation and the strife between duty and affection. Valid reason for a brief reprieve before the final leave-taking was found in the unusual storminess of the weather. Husbands who were prepared to obey the law and part with the women and children who had made their homes could not find it in their heart to turn them out houseless and unsheltered, or to add any needless harshness to a fate in itself hard and pitiable. The anguish and trial of these few days who can recount? How was the husband to go home



from the assembly at Jerusalem to his home in the country, and tell the children who ran to meet him and show him all they had been doing in his absence, that these gardens were no longer to be theirs, and that shortly they must quit the roof that had sheltered them since their birth? How was he to enter and tell his wife, perhaps old and infirm and unable to provide for herself, perhaps young and but just rooted in her new hopes and duties, that she must return to her own people, and count this no longer her home? What agonised pleadings, what passages of wild entreaty, reproach, and fondest love, what complications of miseries, anxieties about the future, unveilings of a hitherto disguised past, what strife between purest affections and sense of duty, what givings-way and returns to a better mind, what violent openings up of every man's heart, are all covered under the bare historical statement, "They made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives"!

But through all this misery one thing becomes clear, that the people are determined to obey the law of God. A dead letter it may have been in times past: a dead letter it is no longer. Since first given it had never, even in Israel's best times, received a more signal homage. The people who could carry through such a reform as this, had in them a strength of character that might gladden the heart of any ruler, and that proved them capable of a great future. It was a small matter that they restored the Feast of Tabernacles, which had been obsolete almost from the time of its institution. It was a small matter that they extolled the law in psalms like the 119th. But in this gravest of practical reforms, that cut so deeply into their daily life and deepest affections, they proved themselves worthy of the law and of Jehovah their lawgiver. There is no proof of zeal for God and His law in appointing religious services or in reading or writing religious books. We may thus give expression to feelings and aims which had better be sup-

pressed. Our zeal for God and our sense of His holiness are tested when circumstances require us to give practical effect to what we know to be God's will, to construct our life in obedience to its requirements even when to do so tears the heart and blights every hope we cherish.

To give the law a commanding place was the task of Ezra's life. To make it the living force which should mould the national life was his constant aim. Historians of the period point out that up to Ezra's time the nation had been guided through every crisis by the voice of a living prophet; henceforth they were guided by the written word. Before Ezra the prophet was everything; after him the scribe was everything. For the living voice of the prophet there was now substituted a code or canon of authoritative Scriptures.

Contemporaneous with this important change, if not wholly the cause of it, a remarkable change in the social condition of the Jews took place. During their residence in Babylon they had learned the value of education and the power of an educated profession in a country. Ezra brought with him to Jerusalem a number of educated men, men who could transcribe, read, translate into the dialect of the people, and explain the Hebrew Scriptures. And with the re-instatement of the law, the recognition of the importance of these guardians of the law went hand in hand. Before the captivity no arrangement existed for the regular and thorough instruction of the people. The law was little known, and was scarcely used at all as a text-book of instruction. But now this condition of things was no longer tolerated. The law was carefully edited, copies of it were multiplied, well trained teachers of it were scattered through the land, and accordingly the need for living prophets was less felt. The scribe was henceforth the guide in Israel. The days of inspiration were left behind. God was listened to no longer through the living

voice of men fired with zeal for holiness and truth, but through the record of what He had uttered to the fathers. The people learned to live at a farther remove from the Divine presence. Between the living, present God and themselves they put the letter of the law, and gradually came to take less and less to do with the living God, hiding themselves from Him in what was meant to manifest Him. But no strictness in adhering to the written word can ever compensate for alienation from the living God. The record of what God said to others is valuable, and the Bible must always be immeasurably precious; but the study of it can never take the place of our own direct communion with the living God, and our present recognition of His guidance of our own life and spirit.

Ezra, then, accomplished one of the greatest works in Jewish history. He diffused a knowledge of the law, and he rooted in the Jewish mind the conviction that the law must become a reality in the life of every man. His successors, in their endeavours to bring under the law's dominion every detail of daily life, lost sight of the great principles of obedience and the broad laws of morality in a cloud of minute and fanciful and useless regulations. They made void the law by their traditions. They spent their energies in the letter, and lost sight of the spirit of obedience and holiness. The law became more to them than the God who gave it or the brother for whose sake it was given. So that in the days of our Lord the scribes and guardians of the law were dangerous to true religion and morality, devoid of love and tenderness for sinners, and absorbed in a superficial routine of paltry observances.

But this must not be laid to Ezra's charge. Nehemiah may have had in him the germs of the pharisee, but in Ezra a different spirit is discernible. In fact, if the root of pharisaism may be traced to this period, there also dates from it a saying which cuts at the same root and indicates

with matchless point the true spirit of obedience. When the law was read to the people by Ezra and his friends, and when for the first time they heard its requirements, they trembled and wept, knowing how flagrantly they had neglected it in times past, and alarmed at the prospect of having to live up to it now. They were departing with heavy hearts to strive so to keep an impossible law as to escape the severe punishment of their Lawgiver. Their teachers at once detect the error of their mood, and with a parting word bid them go home, not to mourn and weep, but to feast and be glad; "for," as they profoundly add, "the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Gloom secures the failure it anticipates. Reluctant obedience, that from the first feels itself overtaxed, will never accomplish its task. Fear is fatal to the spirit of religious service, for service rendered through fear is necessarily unacceptable to God. Love that fills the soul with gladness and buoyancy and persistent vigour must precede acceptable obedience. We must know God sufficiently to see the glory of being called to serve Him before we can yield Him acceptable obedience. Obedience which is constrained, rendered under compulsion and through fear, is unacceptable, feeble, brief, irregular. True obedience must be an obedience in which we can find our life, the constant and fullest expression of ourselves. It must be like the discovery of his fit profession or calling to a young man, a thing he gives himself to with gladness, ardour, and hope. God lives not by constraint, does good not by compulsion; and to the same life He graciously calls us. No other life is possible. An eternity of gloomy, half-hearted, enforced obedience is out of the question. We must so know God as to learn to rejoice in Him, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength. All other strength is delusive. It may do to begin with, and may serve for awhile, but it cannot last and be the strength of life eternal. To recognise God's

supremacy is the beginning of all strength. To recognise that God is God, and that His supremacy is identical with the absolute wisdom and absolute love; to perceive that only by doing God's will and work can our strength be well spent, and that His inviting us to and fitting us for actual friendship with Him is infinitely gracious—thus to know God and the hope of His calling is lasting joy and strength.

MARCUS DODS.

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### DR. MACLAREN.

DR. MACLAREN'S life-work has been that of a preacher. Though he has published not a few volumes of sermons, he has scarcely been in the strict sense an author. The first collection of discourses issued by him was printed for private circulation in Manchester in 1859, and is thus prefaced: "These sermons have no pretensions to accuracy and completeness either of matter or of manner. Some attempt has been made to prune roughnesses and repetitions, which, though of little moment in spoken address, are grave blemishes when in print. But these and other faults are too deeply ingrained to be got rid of by any process short of recasting the whole. For the most part therefore the very faithful reports of Mr. W. H. Hill have been printed *verbatim*." Two editions of this volume were privately printed, and then, in 1863, Messrs. Macmillan showed their usual discernment in reproducing the volume, with a few additions and omissions, in what is now so well known as the first series of *Sermons Preached in Manchester*. The same publishers, it will be remembered, took up a book privately printed in Birmingham, and gave to the wide public *John Inglesant*.

The success of this book was very great, and Dr. MacLaren has since issued many volumes, particularly of late years, when his sermons have been regularly reported. In