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HELL HATH ENLARGED HERSELF

- ISA. 5:11-23. - SEPTEMBER 27. -

Golden Text: – "Wine is a mocker." – Prov. 20:1.

THE Lesson Committee assigned this as a temperance lesson: and undoubtedly it has in it a warning against intoxication. Nevertheless in our judgment, the context being considered, other matters are more reprehended in the lesson than intemperance. Undoubtedly there would be "woe to them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflame them." However, they would be only moderate drinkers evidently who would, beginning so early, only by night become inflamed or drunken. We certainly can heartily endorse the thought that any indulgence of alcoholic spirits is dangerous – that intemperance lies at the foundation of many woes of life, sapping the manhood, the vigor, and undermining the moral sense and general character. We rejoice that the eyes of men's understanding are opening to more proper appreciation of the importance of this evil and that great good is resulting, not only to individuals, but to communities. Since the exhilarating effects of alcohol evidently deceive many, we think it well here to introduce a clipping which bears directly upon the subject.

"ALCOHOL OUT OF THE RACE"

"The contestants in the Marathon Race, which is run on April 19 from Ashland to Boston, twenty-five miles, were notified this year in the following terms: 'Alcohol in any form is positively forbidden before, during and immediately after the race. It never does good, and usually does harm. Disregard of the

foregoing shall be considered sufficient grounds for disqualification by the physician in charge.'

"In previous Marathon races some men who had become fagged had resorted to alcohol and other stimulants, and some of them fell unconscious soon after taking the stimulants. This year the six prominent Boston physicians who examined the one hundred and twenty-four men entered – one hundred and three of whom started and seventy-five finished – stated that the condition of the men was far superior to that of the previous year. So far as can be learned, no alcohol or drugs were used. No runner collapsed, and the record of physical endurance in this, the greatest race in America, if not in the world, is a wonderful one. The twenty-five consecutive miles, up hill and down, were run in an average of less than six minutes each, which is only a minute and a half slower than the majority of mile races on the best cindered tracks. Previous Marathon records were smashed, because the men depended on long and careful training rather than on stimulants. Alcohol was ruled out of the race, as it will be out of every contest of brawn or brains."

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SCOPE OF OUR LESSON

The chapter of which our lesson is a part commences with a parable in which our Lord represents Palestine as his vineyard and the Jews as the choice vine of his planting, from which he would look for much fruitage of a choice quality. Instead it brought forth worthless grapes. Hence through the Prophet and parable he declares that having done everything reasonable and proper for the fruit, he would now take away its hedging and allow it to be trodden down by the wild beasts and to lie waste. (Vs. 1-7.) This parable our Lord almost duplicated and we may understand therefore that while it may have had some application to Isaiah's time as the period of 70 years desolation, nevertheless

really the fulfilment on a still larger scale took place at the time of our Lord's first advent, when, because of their wrong condition of heart and rejection of him, he declared their house left desolate, and, as the Apostle says, "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." Verses 24 to 30 continue this thought and show the mighty power which caused the fall of the Jewish polity.

The intervening verses, namely, from the 8th to the 23rd, treat of the reasons why the Lord was displeased with them and rejected them.

(1) Their selfishness was foremost amongst their sins – the desire to join house to house, farm to farm – to become rich was put as the most prominent sin because that desire leads to other sin. As the Apostle suggests, "The love of money [wealth] is the root of all evil." The result of this was shown to be a land scarcity as respects the poor, and the Lord's resolution that he would punish such selfishness so that the homes would become desolate, empty, and the mansions uninhabited and the fields unfruitful, so that the practice of iniquity, injustice, lovelessness, spell "failure" in the end.

(2) Next comes the verse 11 of our lesson, in which the Lord reprehends strong drink, the inflaming influence **[R4257 : page 301]** of wine, and the music and feasting indulged in by the wealthy who added house to house and field to field. It is evident that the wealthy consume considerable liquor and often without becoming seriously intoxicated, but no doubt the liquor has its influence in helping them promote selfish propositions, which disregard the interests of others, so that sometimes iniquities are hatched into activity which in sober sense would not have been countenanced. This is the essence of the Lord's complaint – "They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." Money-making, feasting, music absorb the attention of the great and influential, which means the

disregard of the more important things of the divine plan – the things to which typical Israel, as well as the things to which Spiritual Israel during this Gospel Age, have been called.

(3) The result of all this was that the masses, lacking the proper influence from their more talented leaders, became expatriated – separated from the hopes and ambitions which were Israel's as a nation – the poor lost the ideals necessary to their progress in a good way and instead got wrong ideals along the line of selfishness, pride, worldliness – ideals which they would have longed to follow had they possessed the talents and ability. Thus the wrong influence of those intoxicated with the love of money and of pleasure not only affected themselves, but the whole people of Israel. Correspondingly in Spiritual Israel we find similar conditions.

Verse 13 points out the effects of the wrong course upon the people, as seen from the divine standpoint. The Israelites had practically become the slaves of their brethren, the rich. They were in practical captivity through a lack of knowledge. The most honorable of them were famished from lack of proper ideals and nourishment from the prophecies of the Lord in instructions of his Word, and the whole multitude was parched with thirst, lacking vigor, vitality and energy as respects the Lord's great purposes, to which he had called them to be his special people. Similar conditions apply now to Spiritual Israel – Christendom. The greatest minds of the world have become absorbed in wealth and pleasure-getting, and direful have been the results upon the masses of Christendom. The people find themselves really starving, hungry and thirsty. They have not satisfied their cravings from an earthly standpoint, because under present conditions this is impossible, and as for spiritual food and drink these have been taken away by the evolutions of the higher critics, who plainly tell the people that the Word of God is not the bread of Truth, but poisonous food – error. As a result

the masses of Christendom today, while prosperous outwardly as never before, are not really contented, but hungry for wealth and pleasure, and especially for happiness, which they will never find in the direction in which they are seeking it.

HELL HAS OPENED HER MOUTH

The word "hell" in verse 14 is sheol in the Hebrew and signifies the grave, the tomb, the abyss – oblivion. To the Israelites this may have meant that because of the wretched condition of the poor classes and the accumulation of lands, etc., in the hands of the wealthy, there was a great increase of mortality, of the death rate. But the application to Spiritual Israel may be a spiritual one, a reference to the fact that the spiritual hopes and ambitions of many are going down into oblivion – that faith is perishing among the people. How true this is! The Prophet says that thousands shall fall to one who stands. Oblivion is rapidly swallowing up the multitude, including also those who have once rejoiced in faith. The mean man is brought down and the great is humbled, and also the lofty – the proud. The full scope of this judgment of the Lord on Christendom is not yet manifest, but in the end the Lord of hosts shall be exalted and honored in respect to the judgment he will bring upon the people and the righteousness he will manifest. Then the gentle lambs will feed in the pastures which he will provide and the wastes which the profligate had taken possession of as their own shall be turned over to others whom they would not recognize.

DRAW INIQUITY WITH FALSEHOOD

Another statement of the evils which caused the overthrow of typical Israel is shown in verse 18. A special wound had come upon the influential ones who had been disposed to use falsehood as cords in carrying forward their inequitable schemes. It may be safely said that falsehood is the outgrowth of selfishness and that nearly all the lying that is done in the world is in its interest to

accomplish iniquity. The Prophet's words are, "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity." These are represented as scoffing at the second coming of Messiah. Inflamed with the wine of Babylon and with their love of money and pleasure they disbelieve the glorious promises of Messiah and his Kingdom and say, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it." In other words they claim to be in full accord with the Lord, to be perfectly ready for his Kingdom if he had one and if it ever will come. They claim to be wise and call those who trust in the Word of the Lord fools and tell them that if they had the knowledge of the Higher Critics they would no longer trust to the Bible.

CALL EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL

Continuing the picture the Lord declares that there will come woe to them because they have called the evil things which they practice good, and because the good things, truth and equity, they have treated lightly and spoken of as evil – nonsensical. They, Higher Critics, call darkness light, and the light of truth they call darkness. They put the bitter of error instead of the sweet of truth. This will mean to them very shortly trouble. The Lord continuing says that "woe will come unto them because they are so wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight." They have a wisdom and prudence which is of the earth earthy – sensual, devilish. They neglect the wisdom which comes from above, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits." They are mighty to drink the wine of Babylon, intoxicating from the dark ages – they can swallow these doctrines and not be intoxicated by them as are the masses. They are men of strength and can drink mingled strong drink – strong doctrines.

These strong doctrines may perplex the masses of Spiritual Israel, but these strong men have a way of taking all the creeds, all the doctrines, and mingling them together, declaring their full harmony and that separately and as a whole they are splendid. Thus at this present time they are making a union of all the different creeds and saying that any strong-minded person should be able to drink all these creeds without **[R4257 : page 302]** injury. The Prophet says that these are they "which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him." If, for instance, a professed servant of God shall declare that he disbelieves practically all the teaching of God's Word, they stand ready to justify him in his wickedness, if he claims the right still to continue to pose as a servant of God. Why? For a reward. That they may in so doing justify their own belief and that they may maintain their standing and honor of men in silence and pose as strong-minded men, able to drink much strong drink. They are ready, also, to take away the righteousness of the righteous, to subdue those who speak the Truth, to slander them, to say all manner of evil against them falsely. Why? They do this also for a reward. Because they desire to be on the popular side and to retain the rewards which are accorded such. **[R4258 : page 302]**

The lesson to all who seek to be in harmony with the Lord is that they are not to follow the course of the great and the influential of Christendom, but to follow the Lord, to hearken to his Word, and to humbly follow in the footsteps of our dear Redeemer.

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