

Nehemiah

No. 1

Foreword

These notes and comments on Nehemiah were written at a time when the witness connected with the Berean Expositor was in a state of transition. Like Nehemiah, we, too, have had "open letters"; we, too, have experienced the wearisome effect of "much rubbish"; we, too, have received invitations to occupy a "broader" platform, to come down into the wide open "plain" and not cramp ourselves within the prescribed limits of a "prison ministry". We were particularly attracted to the thought that the goal of Nehemiah's efforts namely, "The Pulpit of the Opened Book" (Neh. viii. 4, 5), was similar to our own. Because of this, we expected to find much in the experiences of Nehemiah that would prove a word in season to ourselves. On many critical occasions, when the policy of the work hung in the balance, we have taken heed to the counsel of Nehemiah and have never yet been disappointed, and we shall have to return to this book again and again.

The chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah has been discussed in the closing chapters of the series entitled "Time and Place",* and the reader is advised to acquaint himself with the arguments there put forward to establish the interrelationship of these two books. The book opens with a statement concerning the writer, "Nehemiah", a date, "the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year", a reference to the state of the "Jews", the "captivity" and "Jerusalem", which is followed by a prayer of some length and fulness, and concludes with the information that Nehemiah was "the King's cup-bearer". The subject of chapter ii. follows a similar pattern, the prayer this time, however, being the briefest on record. Before considering these passages in detail let us set out this arrangement.

Nehemiah i. 1 - ii. 4

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| A i. 1 | <i>Date.</i> | Month Chisleu. |
| B i. 2-11. | | Weeping, mourning, fasting, and prayer because of condition of Jerusalem. |
| | C i.-11. | The King's cup-bearer. Office stated. |
| A ii. 1. | <i>Date.</i> | Month Nisan (four months later). |
| | C ii.-1. | I took wine to the King. Office used. |
| B ii. 2-4. | | Sadness, sorrow of heart and prayer because of condition of Jerusalem. |

We shall find that structurally the remainder of chapter ii. belongs to the next great division of the subject matter, and it will be considered in its place and relation to the theme.

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah" (Neh. i. 1).

It is evident that the intention of this opening statement is to intimate that Nehemiah himself made this record, just as we under-

* A series which commenced in Volume XXXIII.

stand that the expression "The words of Amos" (Amos i. 1), or "The words of Jeremiah" indicates that the prophet recorded the prophetic utterances attributed to him. The name Nehemiah is of prophetic import; it means "The Comforter (appointed by) the Lord", and contains the word translated "comfort" in Isaiah xl. 1, which verse stands at the head of a prophecy that speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem in two aspects.

1. The restoration carried out under the command of Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 28; xlv. 1-5), and
2. The complete restoration yet to take place under the benign sway of the Messiah.

To those who sighed concerning the desolations of Jerusalem, and hoped for its restoration, the very name of this man would give courage and cheer—"The Comforter (appointed by) Jehovah".

From Nehemiah x. 1, we gather that Nehemiah was one of the princes of Israel, for chapter ix. 38 tells us that "princes" as well as Levites and priests sealed the covenant there made. Moreover, he is called "The Tirshatha", a title indicating "fear" or "reverence" (compare the Persian *torsh*, severe, austere). In Nehemiah xii. 26 he is called "The governor", where the word so translated is *pechah*, a foreign word common to the Arabians and Persians. The note in the Companion Bible, "Governor-Pasha", must not be taken to indicate that Pasha is derived from *Pechah*, as that would be false etymology. A further reason for the supposition that Nehemiah was probably a prince of Judah, is the fact that "the King's seed" and "princes" were taken prisoners to Babylon. The character of this man of God shows him to be of fearless integrity, a firm believer in the promises of his God, a fervent patriot, a man of prayer, and a splendid leader of the people, being especially proof against intimidation or corruption. The need to-day is much the same, and if the study of this book but manifests both the activities of the enemy and the way in which these activities are to be met and overcome, it will be a blessing indeed.

"And it came to pass in the month Chisleu" (Neh. i. 1).

Let us take this opportunity of recording the months of the Jewish year, commencing with Abib, as indicated in Exodus xii. 1

- i. Abib or Nisan (April). Abib means "The ear month" Exodus ix. 31; xiii. 4. (In the books of Nehemiah and Esther, the name Abib is exchanged for the Babylonian name of the god of "spring", Neh. ii. 1. Est. iii. 7).
- ii. Zif (May). Chaldee. "Brightness".
- iii. Sivan (June). Uncertain.
- iv. Thammuz (July).
- v. Ab. (August). In later Jewish writings.
- vi. Elul (September). "Gleaning".
- vii. Tisri or Ethanim (October). Tisri is found in later writings. Ethanim means "perennial".
- viii. Bul (November). "Rain".
- ix. Chisleu (December). Orion.
- x. Tebeth (January). "Winter"
- xi. Shebat. (February).
- xii. Adar (March).

One or two points of interest are brought to light by an examination of this list of names. During the time of Moses, the first month of the year was called Abib; the name occurs in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In the days of, and after, the captivity, the old name of the month is dropped and Nisan, a Babylonian name, takes its

place. The testimony of these two names is valuable evidence for the historicity of the books of the Bible. In the days of Solomon, the names of the month had to be explained thus:—

“In the month Zif, which is the second month” (1 Kings vi. 1).

Later, after the captivity, the explanation takes the opposite form, the names being added to explain the number, thus “In the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth” (Esther ii. 16). These features, together with the appearance of Babylonian and foreign names, are evidences of the changes that were overtaking the people of Israel. Nehemiah tells us that his inquiry after the condition of his brethren and country was made “in the month *Chisleu*, in the twentieth year”. By comparing this passage with the next date, given in Nehemiah ii. 1, we discover that this was the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Strictly speaking Artaxerxes is not a private name, but an appellative title, like Pharaoh, and was common to a number of kings. It means “Great King” (*Arta*—great, *Kshatza*—king). From the record of the Behistun rock (see *The Berean Expositor*, Vol. iv.-v., pages 78, 79) we learn that he was the husband of Esther (“the queen also sitting by him” Neh. ii. 6), and the father of Cyrus, who gave the order to rebuild the temple (Ezra i. 1).

The date of this twentieth year of Artaxerxes is 454 B.C., proof of which will be found in the series already referred to entitled “Time and Place”. This is of extreme importance because of the relation of this date with the prophecy of Daniel ix. On this date, therefore, Nehemiah commences his record, and tells us that he was in “Shushan the palace”. The city of Shushan has been excavated, and a palace, built on a mound 1,000 feet square, laid bare. The palace had several groups of columns enclosing a central hall 200 feet square, and outside, separated by a wall some eighteen feet thick, were three porticos 200 feet wide and supported by columns. It is highly probable that in one of these, protected by awnings, the great banquet, described in Esther i. took place. The river upon which it stands is referred to in Daniel viii. 2 by the name *Ulai*, which occurs in the writings of Pliny, who, in his Natural History, calls it *Eulaeus*. To Nehemiah, on this auspicious date, came Hanani, one of his brethren and certain men of Judah (Neh. i. 2).

The edict of Ezra i. 3 had not yet gone forth; the Jews were not yet “free”, consequently Nehemiah enquires concerning those that had “escaped” which were left of the captivity. These that are said to have “escaped” may have slipped away from the lands of their captivity and made their way back to Jerusalem, but there is another word, *malat*, that carries that meaning. The word used here, *peletah*, occurs in Ezra ix. 8, 13, 14, 15, “escape” and “deliverance”, where the idea is not so much slipping away from captivity as being delivered from, or spared, captivity. In Ezra ix. 14 the word “escaped” is practically synonymous with a “remnant” and consequently Nehemiah may refer to those who by some means had avoided transportation and so remained in their desolated and ruined city. This meaning is confirmed by the reply of Hanani,

“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the Province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire” (Neh. i. 3).

We read of this company in Jeremiah xl. There they are called “The people that were left in the land” (6); “The poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon” (7); “a remnant of Judah” left by the king of Babylon (11); and “The Jews which are gathered” (15). Judæa, the portion of the royal tribe of Judah, is now called “The Province”, and is so referred to by the letter sent by Tatnai to Darius the king (Ezra v. 5). It was but one of the “hundred and twenty and seven provinces”, referred to in Esther i. 1. Over the whole kingdom Darius had set a hundred and twenty princes, ruled over by three presidents “of whom Daniel was first” (Daniel vi. 1. 2). The difference between the hundred and twenty-seven provinces and the hundred and twenty princes is left unexplained, but this is an evidence of truth rather than of a discrepancy, for there might have been many reasons to account for it, well known to all at the time, whereas a forger would have seen to it that the number in both accounts was the same. This remnant left in Jerusalem were in “affliction and reproach,” and, moreover, the wall and the gates of the city being destroyed, the private life of the people was invaded, and the observance of the law hindered, as may be seen from the command of Nehemiah in chapter xiii. 17-22. While the gates with their locks and bars remained unrepaired, it was not possible to enforce the keeping of the sabbath against the intrusion of those who sold wares. Upon hearing this grievous news, Nehemiah tells us that he sat down and wept and mourned certain days and fasted, and then addressed himself by prayer to “The God of heaven”. This divine title is peculiar to the times of the Gentiles, it suggests that God had withdrawn Himself from among His people and ruled from afar, even as Nebuchadnezzar had been forced to acknowledge that “The heavens do rule” (Daniel iv. 26, 35). The title occurs in 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 23, and Psalm cxxxvi. 26, where the deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh and other enemies is the theme. The bulk of the occurrences is found in Ezra (eight occurrences), Nehemiah (four occurrences) and Daniel (four occurrences).

Nehemiah

No. 2

Prayer, Providence and Provision.

The prayer of Nehemiah, consequent upon the sad report he had received concerning his people and their city, occupies the remaining portion of the opening chapter of this book. It has interesting parallels with the prayer of Daniel, recorded in Daniel ix. Both prayers are concerned with the same subject, but whereas Nehemiah's prayer was focussed upon his interview with the king—which interview was to produce the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem (Neh. ii. 7, 8 and Dan. ix. 25), the commandment being given in the year 454 B.C.—Daniel's prayer led to the prophetic vision of the seventy weeks, the date line of which was this self-same year, 454 B.C., "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem," and which looked, not to the immediate rebuilding of the street and the wall in troublous times, but to the final and blessed restoration of the city and people at the time of the end.

Both men were moved to tears, fasting and prayer, the one by the report of Hanani, the other by the prophecy of Jeremiah (Neh. i. 4, 5; Dan. ix. 1, 2). Both addressed God as "terrible" and "dreadful" (Neh. i. 5; Dan. ix. 4), using the same Hebrew word. Both speak of God keeping covenant and mercy, both call upon God either to let His ear be attentive or to incline His ear. Both unite their personal confession with the confession of their people, and both refer to Moses as the Lord's "Servant", attributing to him the law, commandments, covenants, curses and promises, exactly as is found written in the Pentateuch.

"Prosper I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the King's cup-bearer" (Neh. i. 11).

This prayer that he might "prosper" was no self-seeking on the part of Nehemiah. It was not the prosperity of ease and plenty; it was rather the carrying forward of the project he had in mind. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word, *Tsaleach* is "To go over, or through, a river" and then it came to mean the surmounting of obstacles and achieving success. The obstacle that was before Nehemiah's mind was the possible attitude of the king. How would he react to the request of a captive to be released and sent back to build the walls of a rebellious city? If with suspicion and disfavour, a man so intimately attached to the royal person of the king might easily pay forfeit for such temerity with his life. He was the King's cup-bearer, or "butler" as the Hebrew word is translated in Genesis xl., where it is made clear that such an official could offend his royal master and suffer imprisonment. In an Eastern court, where poison was often resorted to, Nehemiah's was a position of great trust, and the possible corruption of one so intimately connected with the royal table, was therefore a constant source of anxiety to him who wore the crown.

When Nehemiah addressed the king he used the conventional title of respect, "Let the king live for ever!" and sought favour in his sight (Neh. ii. 3, 5), but in his prayer to the God of heaven, he referred to the mighty king Artaxerxes as "this man", yet not with any disrespect for he used the noblest Hebrew word he could, namely *Ish*.

Four months intervened between the report of Hanani and the request before the king. Four months of waiting, of grieving, of praying. Whether Nehemiah had any plan which he was waiting to put into effect, we cannot know, but the king observed the sadness of the man, and knowing that he was not physically ill, his comment was, "This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Instead of saying, "Now I knew that I should be pitied by my royal master," Nehemiah makes no secret of the fact that the king's command made him "sore afraid". He promptly, yet respectfully, unburdened his heart before the king, saying,

"Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" (Neh. ii. 3).

The Lord prospered the way of Nehemiah and the first obstacle was surmounted:

"For what dost thou make request?" (Neh. ii. 4).

This word, "make request", is often used to indicate prayer, for example, "To seek" by prayer and supplication, as in Daniel ix. 3. Before Nehemiah prays the King's aid, he puts up another prayer to the God of heaven, but this time, no analysis of it nor comparison with Daniel's is possible for it was wordless and instantaneous.

"So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king" (Neh. ii. 4, 5).

Like Daniel, Nehemiah may have prayed regularly "three times a day" "toward Jerusalem" (Dan. vi. 10) "kneeling on his knees."

But Nehemiah knew that prayer was something beyond and above all convention; without bodily movement or the upward glance of an eye, without perceptible pause, he cast his all on God and spoke to the king.

Now, preparation for this very epoch-making movement had been made by God Himself. Thirteen years previously, a Jewess, named Esther, had been taken by the King and made queen instead of the deposed Vashti (Esther ii. 17). When the people of Israel were threatened with extermination by the hatred of Haman, Mordecai, Esther's uncle, even then realized the Lord's hand in the elevation of his niece to the throne, saying, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther iv. 14).

Esther's self-sacrificing intervention was blessed to the salvation of her people, and the overthrow of her enemies (Esther vii.).

Nehemiah's request was put before the king:—

"If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldst send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it" (Neh. ii. 5).

Before the record of the king's reply comes the parenthetical clause ("the queen also sitting by him"). The more frequent word for "queen" is the Hebrew *Malkah*, but the word here is *Shegal*, which occurs only in Psalm xlv. 9; Daniel v. 2, 3, 23, and in the passage before us. It is not a Hebrew word but comes from the ancient Akkadian *sha*, "bride" and *gal*, "great". It would exactly fit Esther's position as the foreign bride of the great king. God sometimes answers our prayers years before they are breathed, and the coming together of the two passages—"So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king" and the parenthetical clause "the Queen also sitting by him"—throw light upon a neglected aspect of this vital subject.

The prayer of Nehemiah was granted. Leave of absence from the court, together with letters addressed to the governors "beyond the river" guaranteeing safe convoy, together with instructions to the keeper of the King's forest, or park, (*pardes*, a Persian word that gives us, through the Septuagint, the word "paradise") to provide the necessary timber for the work of restoration which he was about to undertake. A man of prayer need not be unpractical: the special providence that placed Esther on the throne, did not necessarily mean that beams for building would come "out of the blue". These necessary things, though provided by the king, were nevertheless the answer of God as Nehemiah recognized when he said,

"And the king granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me" (Neh. ii. 8).

We shall learn by the record that follows, that answered prayer and providential interposition do not render us immune from attack. Like Paul at a later date, Nehemiah could have said regarding this work to which he had been led,

"A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. xvi. 9).

The story we are about to follow is one largely made up of these two elements. They are features that are associated with all true service, our own included, and if we study this record of Nehemiah aright, there will be brought to light that which will encourage us to persevere, as well as reveal the perennial methods of spiritual opposition, and the spirit in which all such animosity must be met.

We commence this study with the words that immediately follow: "Then I came to the governors beyond the river" (Neh. ii. 9) with which our next article must open.

Nehemiah

No. 3

The first clash with the enemy.

We closed our last article with the reference to the letters which the king had given Nehemiah, and which he had presented to “the governors beyond the river”. Nehemiah comments upon the fact that not only did the king give him leave of absence and letters both to provide material and safety, but that he “sent captains of the army and horsemen with me”. As the word translated captain, *sar*, is often rendered “prince” and as the “horsemen”, *parash*, are distinguished from *susim*, “horses”, as for instance in 1 Kings iv. 26, “Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses [*susim*] for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen [*parash*],” this cavalcade must have been impressive—captains who were “princes” and cavalry rather than horses—yet it is questionable whether this added kindness of the king was really a help. The multiplication of horses had been forbidden by the law (Deut. xvii. 16), the context suggesting that it might lead the king and the people to lean rather upon the arm of flesh than upon the Lord. Consequently we have the words of the Psalmist saying,

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (Psa. xx. 7).

Whatever the feelings of Nehemiah were, we can sympathise with the extreme difficulty he would be in, either in accepting or refusing this cavalcade. To-day, this attempt of the king to help forward the

word of God, is comparable to the worldly advice, and often ready help, proffered by those who have no knowledge of God and His ways, and it is by no means a simple problem to know just how to react to these advances. We are to "give none offence", while at the same time doing "all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31, 32). We may gather some guidance from the record, however, for while Nehemiah apparently accepted the retinue—and to have refused might have been churlish beside jeopardizing the work in hand—he made no compromise with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, telling them that they had "no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (Neh. ii. 20).

Immediately following the reference to "captains" and "horsemen" comes the first note of opposition:

"When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Neh. ii. 10).

Horonaim is mentioned on the Moabite stone, and, as we gather from Nehemiah xiii. 27, 28, Sanballat was an alien. The varied methods he employed in opposition to the purpose of God typify the ruses and wiles that must be expected by any servant of the Lord in the prosecution of his calling and service. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed", and it should be obligatory upon every man entering the ministry that he make a definite and personal study of the book of Nehemiah. Sanballat was in fellowship with Tobiah, the servant, in this opposition to the Divine purpose. Tobiah was an Ammonite (Neh. ii. 19) and still retained the designation, "the servant" or slave, probably indicating his servile nature. He was particularly dangerous, for he had married into the family of Shechaniah, and his son into the family of Meshullam (Neh. vi. 17, 18). As these unholy alliances were far more to be dreaded than the direct attack of confessedly hostile powers so, too, their modern equivalent must be marked and avoided to-day, if the work of the Lord is to prosper in our hands.

In alliance with these two, but not mentioned until later, is "Geshem the Arabian" (Neh. ii. 19). This man is called Gashmu in Nehemiah vi. 6. The Arabians are descendants of Hagar and in Psalm lxxxiii. 6 are called "Hagarenes". That Psalm speaks prophetically of an unholy alliance of nations who take "crafty counsel" against the people, saying:

"Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation" (Psa. lxxxiii. 4).

It should be observed that among the nations which this Psalm shows will be confederated against Israel, are Edom, Moab, Ishmael, Hagarenes, Ammon and "the children of Lot", all of which were linked to Israel by ties of blood and therefore so much the more dangerous. Their spiritual equivalent, as viewed from the standpoint of Christian service, are the many sects and denominations, all claiming kinship in Christ, but all bringing with them elements of the flesh and of the world, which, once allowed a place,

spell confusion and bitter defeat to any spiritual project. Far rather suffer through lack of funds and lack of help, than barter the purity of the truth for a specious success or momentary relief. Those responsible for the preservation and the furthering of the Berean Forward Movement are alive to the existence to-day of the Sanballats, Tobiahs and Geshems, and pray that they may ever be awakè to their insidious endeavours.

The first recorded reaction to the movement headed by Nehemiah is that these enemies of the truth "grieved exceedingly". This is not the first time in this narrative that we have met this word, translated "grieved". It is translated in Nehemiah ii. 3, "to be sad"—Nehemiah was sad because of the desolation of Jerusalem but Sanballat was sad, exceedingly, because those desolations were to be restored. Thus what is one man's joy is another man's sorrow, for the purposes of God and Satan are diametrically opposite. Let us remember this at all times, and realize that there can be no "concord" between Christ and Belial (2 Cor. vi. 15).

Arrived at Jerusalem, Nehemiah abode three days and then, at night and with a selected few, made his survey of the ruins of the city. The account is punctuated by the fact that, not until the survey had been accomplished, did Nehemiah tell anyone what was in his heart.

"Neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem."

"Neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work."

"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me" (Neh. ii. 12, 16, 18).

Here again is a lesson for us to learn. In all service for the Lord, it is essential that one first of all "count the cost", and moreover, use no secondhand information where firsthand knowledge is possible.

"I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire" (Neh. ii. 13).

There were twelve gates to Jerusalem (Neh. iii. 1-3) even as there will be twelve gates of pearl in the New Jerusalem (Rev. xxi. 21). We wonder how many of our readers have taken it for granted that there are twelve gates mentioned in the record of Nehemiah. Strictly speaking we find only eleven mentioned by name in chapter iii, but in chapter viii. 16 and xii. 39 the gate of Ephraim is added. The wall adjoining this gate had suffered demolition in the days of Amaziah (2 Chron. xxv. 23) and the gate may have been unrecognizable on Nehemiah's first survey, hence its later mention.

"And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did" (Neh. ii. 16).

While the sequel makes it clear that after this secret midnight survey the purpose of Nehemiah's visit was explained, with the result that

the people said "Let us rise up and build", it has been suggested that Nehemiah had another purpose close to his heart, which he dared not mention to any until he had made sure of his quest. The somewhat curious reference to the fact that somewhere near the gate of the fountain or the king's pool there was no place for the beast upon which he rode to pass, makes it possible that he left the animal with the trusted few who had accompanied him while he pursued his quest on foot, and possibly alone. Nehemiah was in the vicinity of the ruined temple, and the suggestion is that he was intent upon securing from its ruins the sacred scrolls of the Scriptures that were buried there. Later, this book was read in the presence of the assembled people (Neh. viii. 1-9). When this project had been achieved Nehemiah could devote all his energies to the restoration of the city. It is surely significant that in the heart of this record we find "The Opened Book" (Neh. viii. 5) and no mere rebuilding of walls or gates can be considered a worthy work of God, that does not give like prominence to the word of God. The Chapel of the Opened Book justifies its upkeep and continuance, not for the sake merely of the building, not because it is a "chapel", but because it is the chapel of "THE OPENED BOOK".

Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, that trinity of evil, the counterpart of "The world, the flesh and the Devil" of the N. T. "laughed us to scorn", said Nehemiah. This is the laughter of mockery; the word is so translated in Nehemiah iv. 1 where Sanballat "mocked the Jews". It was fellowship with the sufferings of Christ that Nehemiah endured, for the same term is used in Psalm xxii. 7, "All they that see Me, laugh Me to scorn". Further, Nehemiah and his fellows were "despised", another word that linked them with the suffering Messiah (Isa. xlix. 7; liii. 3), and into this scorn and mockery creeps the first note of alarm,

"What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the King?"
(Neh. ii. 19).

Nehemiah's answer is direct and uncompromising. He ignores, without parley, the blackmail incipient in the reference to "rebellion". So must we. Without reserve he states his trust in the God of heaven and his assurance that "He will prosper" them in their work. Even so, he did not make this Divine assurance an excuse for slackness but coupled it with the devoted service of the feeble few: "We His servants will arise and build", and finally he left these enemies with no illusions as to the success of their strategy:

"But ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."
(Neh. ii. 20).

These words have a N. T. equivalent.

"Ye have no portion." The reference here is to an inheritance. The Hebrew word "portion" is translated "inheritance" in the sentence "The Lord is the portion of *mine inheritance*" (Psa. xvi. 5). Or again, "Is there yet any *portion* or inheritance for us in our father's house?" (Gen. xxxi. 14). The word so translated is from

the verb *chalaq*, “to divide”, “They divided the land” (Josh. xiv. 5). There can be no misunderstanding of the intention behind the words “what *portion* have we in David?” (1 Kings xii. 16). Only those who are fellow-heirs can be fellow-workers in the service of the Lord, and we can see this principle in application when Peter said to Simon the Sorcerer, “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter” (Acts viii. 21), a principle amplified by Paul in 2 Corinthians vi. 14-18.

“Nor right.” The word *Tsedaqah*, “right”, first occurs in Genesis xv. 6, where Abraham’s faith was counted unto him “for righteousness”. In the lips of Nehemiah it would mean that right that belonged to Israel by the Lord’s sovereign choice of them.

“Nor memorial.” It is written, “The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance” (Psa. cxii. 6), but of the wicked it is written, “Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out . . . cut off the memory of them from the earth” (Psa. cix. 13-15). By referring to Isaiah xxvi. 14, “Thou hast . . . made all their memory to perish”, we perceive that the hope of resurrection is implied in this reference to “memorial”.

Only those who have the same blessed hope and enjoy the same blessed acceptance by grace, can have a share in the work of the Lord. All other help is a hindrance and ends in disaster.

These are solemn assertions, but they are supported by type, symbol and specific doctrine and example. The reader who would seek fuller and closer parallels would be well advised to read, or re-read, Paul’s last epistle—the second epistle to Timothy—where he will find the N. T. equivalent of the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah

No. 4

“A book of Remembrance.”

Because a superficial reading reveals nothing more than a repetition of names and the recurrence of a phrase, there are chapters in the Bible that the reader, at times, may feel tempted to skip.

“And the next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz.

And the next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel.

And next . . . and next . . .” (Neh. iii. 4, 5).

At first sight this certainly looks uninteresting, but, remembering that it forms part of “all Scripture” which is not only inspired but profitable, we give it further consideration. Who is this Meremoth that repaired the portion of the wall adjoining the Fish Gate? Perusing the whole chapter we find, to his credit, that this man repaired “another piece”, namely “from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house” (Neh. iii. 21). If we enquire why this part of the wall had not been renovated by Eliashib, who was high priest, we find that he was away repairing the Sheep Gate and in his absence Meremoth, who was the son of a priest, may have felt moved to do this piece of extra work as direct service to the Lord. Moreover, there is the bare possibility that the priests, the men of the plain, who “repaired after him” (Neh. iii. 22), were stimulated by his example.

Whatever the explanation, here is the record of this willing worker for all to see. Often such get little thanks for their pains; but the “Well done” of the Lord will more than compensate for any misunderstanding of fellow-servants. Among his faithful fellow-labourers Paul numbered some who were of the spirit of Meremoth. For instance, from what the apostle wrote in Philippians ii. 25-30, Epaphroditus seems to be one who had undertaken “another piece”.

If we consult the book of Ezra (Ezra viii. 33) we shall moreover discover that Meremoth had a post of great responsibility when the

temple building was in progress; there, he who so willingly repaired the external wall, handling rough stone and mortar, is seen weighing silver and gold in the house of God. So we may see that in the seemingly dull record of repairers, Meremoth's story, for one, is calculated to inspire.

But not all the returned Jews under Nehemiah were possessed of this generous spirit. The nobles of the Tekoites "put not their necks to the work of the Lord" (Neh. iii. 5), yet who would question which were the nobler of these, Meremoth or these nobles by station? Those of us who value the "Berean" spirit remember that there is a true "nobility", a nobility commended by the Holy Ghost, where He records by the hand of Luke that the Bereans were "more noble" than the Thessalonians (Acts xvii. 11). It may be that the Tekoites themselves were ashamed of the false dignity of their superiors, for they follow the example of Meremoth and "repaired another piece" (Neh. iii. 27). Let us therefore continue our examination of this record. We find "perfumers" and "goldsmiths", men accustomed to delicate work, not only repairing, but fortifying, the city (Neh. iii. 8). Looking further down the list of workers, we notice in verse 12, that not only did the "ruler of the half part of Jerusalem" do his share in repairing the wall, but it is recorded that "his daughters" worked with him. In the days of Nehemiah this would be an exceptional thing, but the Scriptures reveal that in times of distress and disorder women have often been raised up to fill the breach. Such honoured names as Jael, Deborah and Esther in the O. T. and Phebe and Priscilla in the N. T. will readily come to mind.

Nehemiah not only records the extra labours of Meremoth and of the Tekoites, the labours of the perfumers and of Shallum's daughters, but tells us that one of the workers repaired the wall "earnestly" (Neh. iii. 20). Not only what we do, but how and why we do it, is remembered by the Lord, that searcheth the hearts. Baruch, whose work is thus characterised, may have been incensed at the unwillingness of the nobles who refused, for he is associated with Meremoth (Neh. iii. 20, 21), who, in turn, was working next to them (Neh. iii. 4, 5). The reason for this surmise is that the words "earnestly repaired" are literally "made hot to repair", and that this "heat" means displeasure: anger is referred to in Nehemiah iv. 1 or v. 6, where the "wrath" of Sanballat and the "anger" of Nehemiah is expressed by the same word.

Of those engaged on this work of restoration, we find that some repaired the portion of wall that was "over against" his own house (Neh. iii. 10, 28, 29) but of one it is recorded that he repaired over against his "chamber", where the word used suggests that he was merely a "lodger" (Neh. iii. 30).

Returning to the opening verse of this record we find that the repairs were begun at the "Sheep Gate", that the labourers were "priests" and they not only "builded" but, "sanctified" the object of their labours. The Sheep Gate was so named because sheep intended for sacrifice were brought into the city by this entrance. This is as surely symbolical of a spiritual truth as was the New Year

inaugurated at Passover by Moses (Exod. xii). No work for the Lord can begin anywhere else, all true service springs from and is allied with sacrifice. It may well have been that Eliashib the high priest was not an ideal builder nor his brethren the priests the best of workmen, nevertheless none but priests commence this great work of reconstruction. Again, this is the only occasion where the word "sanctify" is used of this work in Nehemiah iii, the next occurrence being found in Nehemiah xiii. 22, where we read "I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day." Sanctification of the sabbath is evidently connected with the keeping of the gates, and an examination of the context will show how this could be.

The sabbath was being profaned by sellers of fish and ware. To put an end to this profanation Nehemiah issued an order that the gates should be shut at the commencement of the sabbath and not reopened until the day was over. This was more effective than the solemn sealing of the covenant, recorded in Nehemiah x. 31, where we read: "If the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath." The intention was good, but the flesh was weak, and gates possessing "doors thereof, locks thereof, and bars thereof" were more effective. There is a spiritual lesson here that can be applied in a number of ways in connection with the administration of the work connected with Christian service and worship.

There is no dull uniformity in this record of Nehemiah iii. Some repaired the wall that was "over against" his own house (Neh. iii. 10, 23, 28, 29); others a portion of the wall that did not abut upon their own premises, and some definitely worked on a part of the wall that pertained to others. While members of the Body of Christ have their own specific service, there are many occasions where one member shares the labours of another. Paul taught this plainly in a number of passages. Writing to the Galatians he said of burdens generally, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," but when speaking of individual responsibility, that cannot be shared or transferred, he said "Every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. vi. 2, 5). The rebuilding of the whole wall was the concern of every one of the Jews who returned under Nehemiah, but each had his own special portion, which was his own individual responsibility.

Not all those who laboured in this work lived in the city itself; some came from the surrounding villages. So we read of those who came from Gibeon and Mizpah, Beth-haccerem and Zanoah, Beth-zur and Keilah (Neh. iii. 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). These villages were from four to fifteen miles from Jerusalem, and in some cases we find "the men" of the place do the work, as those of Gibeon and Mizpah; in others, the rulers take part, as in the case of the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem. In one instance we have the men of Mizpah serving with the men of Gibeon; then we have one son of the ruler of the part of Mizpah helping at the fountain gate, while another of his sons worked over against the armoury. In one

instance, two rulers of one place, Keilah, are found working together, and it is here, and at the work on the Sheep Gate, that we meet the word "brethren". Some are said to have "built", some to have "repaired", while in one instance a special piece of work was done. This was at the gate of the fountain, where we read that Shallum, the son of the ruler of part of Mizpah, "built it and covered it." The word translated "covered" means "to give shade" as may be seen in Daniel iv. 12, where the beasts of the field are said to have found "shadow" under the great tree of the vision. The wall adjoining this gate of the fountain was the wall of the pool of Siloah mentioned in John ix. 7.

Here was a piece of individual work, meeting a special need. With all the inevitable repetition of the daily round and common task, there is always room for that special act of service that is the exercise of our special gift, the use of our special talent, or the peculiar demands of some portion of service that has fallen to our lot. While all laboured on the wall or the gates, different parts of the wall and different gates were associated with a variety of interests. Thus there was the Sheep Gate serving the temple, and so especially sacred, and the portion repaired by the Gibeonites, which reached to the throne of the Persian governor, and so especially secular, yet each could be, and was, a labour "unto the Lord". We do not expect craftsmen such as goldsmiths and perfumers to be engaged in fortifying a wall, but, as we have said, such was the case here. Others repaired walls that protected the tower of furnaces and ovens; others again found their labours in repairing the protecting wall of Siloah, by the king's gardens, together with the stairs that go down from the city of David. Ovens, fountains, gardens, and stairs are all features of daily life. Yet another set of builders were careful to preserve the sepulchres of David and the house of his mighty men, so keeping alive in the minds of the people the memory of the blessed dead. One contingent of Mizpah secured the armoury; the "earnest" worker, Baruch, together with Meremoth, secured the dwelling of Eliashib, the high priest, who had left his own site in order to serve at the Sheep Gate. Walls that protected the house of the king, and walls that protected the dwelling of those who were "hewers of wood and drawers of water", the Nethinims, were repaired, as also was the wall of the court of the prison. Here is diversity in unity, even as those who belong to the unity of the spirit are reminded that "to every one" was given grace "according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. iv. 7).

Let us read and ponder this memorial of a great work of Priests, Rulers, Citizens, Villagers, Brethren and Daughters united in a common task and prompted by a common zeal, working to a great end; yet all working as free men and women, adapting themselves to the call of the moment, even as we to-day may do in the sphere of service that pertains to our high calling.

Nehemiah

No. 5

The Conspiracy and its Defeat.

How are we to read this book of Nehemiah to profit? We can read it for its own sake and see the way that men of old have been beset, yet have triumphed, but unless we can at the same time range ourselves alongside the record, the most important service, which the reading of the Scriptures is designed to accomplish, will fail.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. x. 11).

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. xv. 4).

This work of building the wall of Jerusalem was carried out "in troublous times" (Dan. ix. 25). The Septuagint uses a word for "troublous" that is reminiscent of the word used by Paul when he said that Christ "made Himself of no reputation". They were times of pressure, straitening, despising, but the opposition did not come from the outside world, it was from those who were in some ways allied with Israel. Sanballat was Governor of Samaria, Tobiah was an Ammonite and so a descendant of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Geshem was an Arabian and, if an Hagarene (Psa. lxxxiii. 6), would complete this trinity of opposition that represents the professing church rather than the outside, ungodly world. If therefore this Scripture was written for our learning and admonition, we shall expect the attack upon our work to spring from those who in many ways *claim alliance with us*, rather than from the ungodly world. And this, alas, we have found to be the case. How will the attack manifest itself? What methods will be adopted? Our work will be belittled. No credit will be given for the burdens we may bear, no margin allowed for the straitness in which we have found ourselves. Our opponents will point to our publications as "small", our meetings as "a mere handful", and our methods as being "out of date", ineffective and behind the times.

When Sanballat heard that, in spite of all difficulties, the wall had been built, "he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews." This mocking has already been recorded in Nehemiah ii. 19, where the word *haag* is rendered "laughed to scorn". It is the same kind of treatment that was meted out to Christ Himself and foreshadowed in Psalm xxii. 7: "They that see Me, laugh Me to scorn"; Nehemiah was having fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. We may therefore take courage as we find ourselves in such honoured company.

Sanballat's first attack was one of derision:

"What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" (Neh. iv. 2).

Tobiah, the servant, with a servant's cringing, echoes his master's scorn by saying:

"Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. iv. 3).

Possibly Sanballat indulged in a little wishful thinking, for if these Jews were really "feeble" then the prodigious task they had undertaken would most certainly fail. The word that gives us the original of "feeble" is often translated "languish"; if therefore there is any parallel between our Christian service and that of Nehemiah, we shall expect to have references made to our age and any appearance of slackening, either true or false, that such critics may feel they can use to belittle our work. No credit is expected for the years of lonely witness, like a voice crying in the wilderness and labouring against intolerable odds never made public. We expect a scornful finger to be pointed at our efforts to "fortify" the witness after years

of buffeting and to hear the equivalent question, "Will they make an end in a day?" "What is the Berean Forward Movement, anyway?" Tobiah's reference to the foxes is a suggestion that the wall built by these feeble Jews would not be so effective as the dry stone wall built round an ordinary vineyard (Song of Sol. ii. 15), but, again, it was the wishful thinking of a mean man.

Nehemiah's response to this opening attack was characteristic both of the man and dispensation under which he lived. He sent back no message, either to Sanballat or to Tobiah, but he prayed most earnestly to God *and got on with his work*. In his prayer he laid before the Lord the fact that his people were "despised", by the use of this word again confessing that he shared the sufferings of Christ (Isa. liii. 3), and, not only so, he recognised that Sanballat's comments, like those of Rabshakeh, were intended to influence the builders and had indeed been aimed at the good name of the Lord Himself. "They have provoked Thee to anger *before the builders*" (Neh. iv. 5). In spite of this attack, therefore, the record continues:

"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work" (Neh. iv. 6).

There is a suggestiveness about the word translated "joined", not obvious to a reader of any translation, however good, but evident, without effort, to a reader of the original. It is only once translated "to be joined together", but many times "conspire" and "conspiracy" and it could not escape such an acute mind as that of Nehemiah, that the completion of the work was the first answer to the "conspiracy" going on around them. It is indeed the very word used in Nehemiah iv. 8, "conspired."

This, then, must be our attitude to any who "join together in conspiracy" against the work of the Lord—refuse to be deflected and go on until the work is complete. We do not stoop to meet conspiracy with conspiracy; rather we meet it by going on with the work entrusted to us. If, by criticism and opposition, we could be influenced to waste our time in fruitless correspondence and to take counter measures, it would suit the enemy well. The one thing he does not want to see is the "joining" of the wall, or the completion of our task.

The statement that the wall was joined together "with the half thereof" has caused some doubt as to Nehemiah's real meaning. He might have meant that the whole encircling wall was completed up to half its height, as the Companion Bible suggests, but in chapter vi. 1 there is no suggestion that the wall was incomplete, but only that all that was still wanting was the erection and fitting of the "doors upon the gates". We therefore see in the words "joined together with the half thereof" a statement meaning that the builders had made both ends of the work to meet. And "making both ends meet" has many applications.

One word more must be observed. Nehemiah noted the way in which the builders did the work: "the people had a mind to work." Their "heart" was in it, for the word translated "mind" is *leb*,

which is translated "heart" 494 times in the A.V. These "feeble" Jews were people of great heart and all such work will go on in spite of attack or scorn.

In Nehemiah iv. 7 the conspirators make their appearance again, and with accession to their ranks. Evidently these "feeble" Jews had inspired some recognition of their political strength for we read not only of Sanballat and Tobiah, but, in addition, of "Arabians", "Ammonites" and "Ashdodites", who were not only very wroth when they heard that the breaches began to be stopped and the wall made up, but now conspired to come and fight against Jerusalem and to hinder the work.

"To fight against" and "To hinder".

Three times does the word "Fight" occur in Nehemiah.

(1.) In the threat of Sanballat and his fellow conspirators (Neh. iv. 8).

(2.) In the call to the builders to fight for hearth and home (Neh. iv. 14).

(3.) In the assurance that God would fight for them (Neh. iv. 20).

If we did not know that the battle was the Lord's, our hearts might well fail us in the unequal struggle. Yet this does not rule out active co-operation. Though Nehemiah trusted the Lord to fight for the people he nevertheless set a watch and armed the builders for the fray. We too are convinced that the work we have done, and the work we are doing is a work most definitely entrusted to us by the Lord, therefore we have not been unduly moved by the appearance, at different stages, of our spiritual "Sanballats". Nevertheless this does not exempt us from prayer, and watchfulness; from a desire to contend earnestly for the faith; or from taking to ourselves the whole armour of God.

A light is thrown upon the tactics of the enemy by the word chosen to give the idea of "hindering". There is a choice of five such words, and the one selected for use here means "to cause one to go astray," "to make an error", even as it is so translated in Isaiah xxxii. 6, "to utter error." Here is revealed a policy of "side tracking" the builders. Let them be diverted to other things; threaten them with a fight and, if that does not succeed, invite them to a conference (Neh. vi. 2) or intimidate them with an "open letter" (Neh. vi. 5). It is good not to be ignorant of our enemies' devices. They are here exposed to view for our learning and admonition.

Nehemiah's first defence against the threatened attack was to "watch and pray" (Neh. iv. 9).

Trouble now began to develop from within. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, even as Paul knew "fightings without and fears within". It is but to be expected that some supporters of the work would be timid and find their hearts failing them. Sanballat had referred to the "heaps of rubbish" (Neh. iv. 2), and it was this "rubbish" that began to make its effect felt.

"And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall" (Neh. iv. 10).

During the war many of our readers have seen with their own eyes the appalling sight of "much rubbish" and possibly felt the burden on their own shoulders. Broken walls, collapsed roofs, floors and furniture smothered with debris, and this, seemingly, interminably; it was not a matter for surprise that the "bearers of burdens" found their strength "decaying" and "stumbling". It appears from this that the removal of the rubbish was a greater task than the building, and moreover it was a necessary prelude to all building, for Judah said "so that *we* (emphatic) are not able to build the wall". In spiritual things also this is very true. The whole foundation is cumbered with the litter of undispensational doctrine, human tradition and mere text-garbling, so that every step forward in the presentation of positive truth is preceded by the prodigious labour of undoing the evils of these things.

Seizing on this admission of Judah, the enemy pressed their attack by commencing a war of nerves.

"They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them . . . and cause the work to cease" (Neh. iv. 11).

This he followed up by a policy of continual assertion, endeavouring by sheer repetition to create a panic. However absurd or untrue, let a statement be repeated enough times, some will eventually say, "There must be something in it." Business men know the power of reiteration, otherwise a firm that sells medicine would not spend money in advertising on every rise of a railway station staircase the slogan, "Take so and so's pills."

Some Jews, who lived outside the walls, were apparently intercepted and to them it was whispered "ten times", "From all places whence ye shall return unto us, they will be upon you." What does this cryptic threat mean? What does it matter? The more mysterious, the greater the hope to create panic.

Nehemiah's reply to this new method of attack was to arm his followers and set guards upon both the lower and higher places, for all alike were open to attack. For this the whole people were used, "after their families with their swords, their spears and their bows." He exhorted the people to trust in the Lord, and by this and his energetic measures and simple faith, defeated the plan of the adversary.

"And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work" (Neh. iv. 15).

Slackness, however, does not appear to have been a part of Nehemiah's make up and so we find that the workers were divided into two companies. One was occupied in building, the other in standing ready, armed against attack. Not only so, but the builders, as well as those who bore the burdens, wrought with a weapon in one hand, or girded at his side. And, to co-ordinate the whole defence, Nehemiah tells us that, "He that sounded the trumpet was by me" (Neh. iv. 18). To some such context the apostle Paul may have alluded when he said:

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Cor. xiv. 8).

Taken away from its context, “trumpet blowing” scarcely seems a fit occupation when men’s strength is being sapped by the burdens laid upon them and their nerves frayed by rumours and mockery. Yet the safety and security of the whole work and workers depended upon the vigilance and clarity of Nehemiah’s trumpeter. The moral is too obvious to need exposition.

Seeing that the Jews who “dwelt by” the adversaries outside the wall were likely to spread the infection of rumour and threat, Nehemiah arranged that “every one, with his servant”, should lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they might be a guard, and labour in the day-time.

It is exceedingly unwise to split the labours of God’s people; unity in service, in prayer, in labour, in suffering, make for consistent work. The enemy knows only too well the truth of the policy, “Divide and rule.” There must be a close relation between centre and circumference. Divided loyalties are dangerous.

The demands upon Nehemiah and his men were such that he wrote, “none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing (Neh. iv. 23), a condition of service with which the apostle Paul was intimately acquainted. As we read some of his statements, we realize that we are listening to a spiritual Nehemiah.

“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1 Cor. iv. 11-13). “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. iv. 8, 9).

Thus many vital lessons can be learned by pondering the record left us by Nehemiah. We have indicated but a few; no one can extract all that lies embedded there. Such lessons become apparent only to those who are in similar circumstances and have similar needs. We repeat, that it seems to us that a reading and study of Nehemiah is a moral necessity for every one engaged in Christian ministry. For ourselves we found that no other portion of scripture provided us with so complete a policy in times of opposition as did this record of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and we have not finished with opposition yet.

Nehemiah

No. 6

“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”

The troubles that beset Nehemiah in his work of restoration, did not arise entirely from enemies without. Weaknesses and treachery within the camp added to the difficulties and made great demands upon grace, wisdom and tenacity. We have already seen how the statement of Judah regarding the “much rubbish” is interpolated between the conspiracy and threatenings of Sanballat and others (Neh. iv. 10), and now, though the counsel of the enemy had been brought to nought (Neh. iv. 15), we read in the next chapter: “there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews” (Neh. v. 1).

It appears that as a result of a famine, the common people had been obliged to mortgage their lands, vineyards and houses that they might buy corn and there was a feeling of bitterness as these afflicted persons complained, “Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards” (Neh. v. 5, 6). Upon hearing this treatment of the Lord’s people Nehemiah’s anger was kindled, and he rebuked the nobles and rulers for exacting usury of their brethren, reminding them that he, as the governor, and his brethren, as servants, might well have exacted corn and money. So, combining “doctrine and manner of life,” he said, “I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day both the mortgaged lands, and the one per cent per month” (‘as was the custom’; *Companion Bible*). It is good to learn that, backed by his example, Nehemiah’s remonstrance brought about repentance and restoration. In Nehemiah v. 14-19 is a supplement showing that, throughout the tenure of his office, he not only did not take the salary of forty shekels due to him, but had refused to be chargeable upon the people, and had, out of his own private means, supported and fed at his own table a hundred and fifty of the Jews as rulers, beside those from among the heathen that served in the work. How many passages in the Acts and the epistles of Paul come to mind; as we read this noble example of selfless service, his refusal, at times, to take financial help; his labour with his own hands; the complete absence of a covetous spirit; his happy association of doctrine with practice.

It is morally impossible to stem the tide of corruption and error within the church, unless the manner of life of him who would withstand and correct it is above suspicion. There is no foolish boasting nor mawkish false modesty in all that Nehemiah records, but a robust piety, so manifest in the concluding prayer,

“Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people” (Neh. v. 19).

The whole chapter—not only the bracketed portion of verses 14-19—is a parenthesis, the building of the wall and the activities of Sanballat being resumed with the opening of chapter vi.

The work had so far progressed that “there was no breach left”, the only parts yet to be completed being “the doors upon the gates.” In chapter iii., the complete work is noted, including the setting up of the doors—as can be seen by observing the frequency of the statement—

“and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.”

We are therefore taken back a little to the period when the walls and gates had been restored, but the doors of the gates, with their locks and bars still remained unfinished. This is in order that we may learn of the further activities of Sanballat and his company and their endeavour to stop the work.

“Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard” (Neh. vi. 1),

they devised and set in motion a fresh line of attack. Frontal attacks and threats having failed, they resorted to deceitfulness and wiles. It is here that the book of Nehemiah once again provides valuable guidance to Christian workers of all times. Though dressed up in a variety of disguises, the wiles of the Devil are repeated again and again down the ages: they appear in the record of Genesis iii. and reappear in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness: they lie scattered through the narrative of the Gospels and the Acts and appear again and again in the epistles. Alas, it is only too easy, after resisting a *direct attack* to fall into the *snare* of the devil. But a mind fortified with the lessons of Nehemiah can at least be forewarned concerning the nature of the devices of the wicked one.

The first trap set for Nehemiah was based on his acknowledged fairness of mind and the known weariness of the conflict. “Let us call a truce. We, Sanballat and Geshem, men in similar positions of authority to yourself, go out of our way to make the first overture of peace.” “Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono” (Neh. vi. 2). Here was a temptation to step down from a God-given position of trust and leave the cramping limitations of the city, for the expanse of the plain. What was there against such a proposal? Nehemiah’s ear would have been sensitive to the way in which Sanballat used the sacred formula “meet together” (Exod. xxv. 22; xxix. 42, 43; xxx. 6, 36; Num. xvii. 4). He might “meet together” with his enemies in the plain, but could he at the same time “meet together” with God?

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos iii. 3).

“What communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. vi. 14).

One of the gibes made by Sanballat and by Tobiah, was at the “feebleness” of the Jewish builders (Neh. iv. 2, 3), whereas the place-name Ono, means, significantly, “strength.” Translated into modern terms, it was as though a letter had been addressed to the

Trustees of the Berean Forward Movement suggesting that by keeping the testimony of the witness to the very exclusive dispensation of the mystery, they were cramping their usefulness and cheating themselves of much help that would be forthcoming were they only to put aside the old-fashioned idea of remaining strictly undenominational and of attempting to hold fast the form of sound words which had been committed to them through the ministry of Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ. How often have we perceived in an invitation to meet on sectarian grounds, to the denial of the ministry of the mystery, Sanballat's invitation to meet together in the "plain" (a place formed as a result of "schism", *bigah*, see Zech. xiv. 4), and especially in "Ono" (*strength*, as in Psalm cv. 36, but, in the original, resembling in spelling, though not in sound, *Aven*, which means iniquity, Micah ii. 1). The invitation would of course be couched in modern terms, with many references to scripture, and suggest that the pages of *The Berean Expositor* be thrown open to a wider circle of Christian writers, or that the shackles imposed by old-fashioned adherence to the terms of the present dispensation be quietly disregarded in exchange for the "wider scope", (the plain) and the "strength" (Ono) which would accrue! How foolish it is for us to mention the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper! How disquieting to question the phrase, "the immortality of the soul"! How narrow to insist upon the "one Mediator" and His "one sacrifice" or on the principle of "right division"!

There is no doubt at all in our minds that if we would but descend into the modern equivalent of the plain of Ono, our numbers would immediately increase and the limitations under which we labour be relieved. But what of loyalty? What of the sacred trust, for the discharge of which, alone, *The Berean Expositor* was first published and still exists?

Nehemiah has given the only answer that can accord with faithfulness:

"I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you" (Neh. vi. 3).

Sanballat's prime object was "to cause the work to cease" (Neh. iv. 11). If threats of violence failed to accomplish his purpose, he did not scruple to use deception and wiles, and, just as the rumour was repeated "ten times" (Neh. iv. 12), so this invitation to meet in the plain was repeated "four times" (Neh. vi. 4).

When the Saviour was tempted in the wilderness, He met the tempter with the words, "It is written", and, as often as Satan returned to the attack, so he was repelled with this same answer. Nehemiah followed the same course:

"Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner."

We cannot parley if we know that God has spoken.

This first attempt at seduction having obviously failed, Sanballat sent his servant the fifth time with an open letter. Written communications addressed to persons of rank would usually be folded and

enclosed in a silken purse, having the lace sealed with wax. Therefore to send Nehemiah an "open letter" was both an insult and an attempt to intimidate, for others beside himself would see its contents. The letter read thus: "It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel; for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah': and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."

We have never been charged with emulating kingship, but we have been called "pope" and "dictator," and that because of our refusal to open either the pages of *The Berean Expositor* or the pulpit and platform of our witness to any and every writer and speaker who desires easy publicity—but we suffer in good company.

However clever, the Sanballats can never completely disguise their alienation from spiritual truth. The unfortunate use of the words "meet together" in the invitation of the plain, is corrected in the open letter, but an equally ominous clause is substituted. To Nehemiah the invitation "let us take counsel together," would too forcibly recall the words of Psalm ii. for him to yield either to the intimidation or the invitation of this open letter. There is something mean about the use of an "open letter" and in the course of our ministry, we have not been spared this method of attack, but never, at any time, have we yielded an inch, and the attempt has always failed. Sometimes this form of attack has come as a threat to "expose" something or other about us in columns of print, accompanied by the usual suggestion that, if we would do this or that, we might be spared the so-called "exposure." With all such we have refused to parley, believing that the line taken by Nehemiah is the one to be followed by all in like circumstances.

"Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart" (Neh. vi. 8).

Where it says in the next verse, "they all made us afraid", it should be read as the *Companion Bible* suggests, "sought to make us afraid," for it is clear from verse 11 that Nehemiah had no fear. All this but drove him to the Source of all strength, and he prayed, "Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."

For the third time the enemy made an assault and this time he brought over to his side a prophet named Shemaiah. More than one official of this name appears in the record of this period. One such returned with Ezra (viii. 13); another was sent by Ezra on an embassy (viii. 16); Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah, worked on the wall (Neh. iii. 29), while a priest named Shemaiah sealed the covenant (Neh. x. 8). The name is built up of "Shem," a "name," and "Jah," a title of God. Many come bearing, superficially, the same name as consecrated servants of the Lord, but they may be wolves in sheep's clothing. When Jude would refer to Enoch, who was translated, he called him "the seventh from Adam" to distin-

guish him from an Enoch who appears in the line of Cain. Thus we see that mere external or nominal agreement is not sufficient, it must be of the heart. This man Shemaiah was bought over by Sanballat and the record says he was "shut up." These words could be interpreted to teach that Shemaiah was "shut up in prison" (Jer. xxxvi. 5), but the word so translated, *azar*, means "to restrain" (Gen. xvi. 2), "to shut up heaven" (Deut. xi. 17) and is used by Jeremiah of the restraint which he had imposed upon himself:

"Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. xx. 9).

The sense seems to be that Shemaiah pretended that he was holding back some prophetic utterance, but his words did not ring true. "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to slay thee". What was Nehemiah's answer? "should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." (Neh. vi. 10, 11.).

Did not Peter, used by the same arch enemy, seek to turn away the Saviour from the path of suffering that awaited Him? (Matt. xvi. 22, 23). Did not Paul say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts xx. 24)?

From Nehemiah vi. 14 we gather that other prophets, and one prophetess, Noadiah, attempted to put this man of God in fear.

However, in spite of all opposition, the wall was finished in fifty and two days as we know from this record that the work was commenced on the third of Ab, which is the fifth month, and even the enemies of the work perceived that it was wrought by God. At the close of the chapter, Nehemiah remembers a yet further cause of trouble, one which revealed treachery within the camp, brought about by contracting unholy alliances. Letters were sent by the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and letters from Tobiah came to them. Tobiah's good deeds were reported before Nehemiah and Nehemiah's words were repeated to Tobiah, who also sent letters to put Nehemiah in fear. This evil state of affairs came about because Tobiah had become the son-in-law of Shechaniah, and his son had married the daughter of Meshullam, the son of Berechiah. Now this Meshullam not only repaired the portion of the wall near the Fish Gate (Neh. iii. 4), but laboured near the Horse Gate as well (Neh. iii. 30). This reveals the sad fact, that a man may be a zealous worker, yet make alliances with the enemy that more than undo any work that he may have done. Loyalty must come first; whether they are, or are not, greatly useful or successful, stewards MUST be found faithful.

In all this record, the record of a work undertaken four hundred years before Christ, there is a remarkable anticipation of the nature of the opposition that Christian workers may expect, even nineteen

hundred years after Christ. These things have been written for our learning and, many a time, in dealing with problems related to the work entrusted to us, we have received light and leading by simply going over the record left by Nehemiah of his associations with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem.

Nehemiah

No. 7

The Pulpit of the Opened Book.

In the seventh chapter of Nehemiah, we have three events recorded:

- (1) The setting of the guard at the gates of Jerusalem (vii. 1-4).
- (2) The reckoning of the people by genealogy (vii. 5-69).
- (3) The offerings made by the rulers and the people (vii. 70-73).

These lead on to the great event recorded in chapter viii, which is nothing less than the setting up of "The Pulpit of the Opened Book". Let us observe the way in which this important subject is introduced.

By noting the reference to the "seventh month" in Nehemiah viii. 2, we perceive that the closing sentence of chapter vii also belongs to this record:

"And when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities, and all the people gathered themselves together as one man."

It is impossible to read this passage and not realize that a goal has been reached, "The seventh month". With the seventh month the ceremonial year ended. In that month came the Feast of Trumpets, the great Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. The great harvest of the year was gathered in the seventh month (Exod. xxiii. 16; Lev. xxiii. 39) and the word used in Nehemiah viii. 1, "the people *gathered* themselves *together*", is the word used for the gathering in of the harvest. It is the word used in Exodus xxiii. 16 and Leviticus xxiii. 39, to which we have just referred. A gathering of the people; a harvest after sowing with tears; the seventh month with its prophetic import; a goal at last achieved.

We have read the record of the earlier chapters and observed with sadness the division that occurred among the people, but here we read that they gathered together "as one man". Moreover this gathered company had one great object before them—nothing less than to ask for the Word of God to be brought out to them. It will be remembered that it was conjectured by us, and others, when dealing with Nehemiah's midnight ride, that he may have been searching for the scrolls of the Scriptures that lay buried beneath the débris of the ruined temple. Here, at any rate, such a book is demanded, and such a book is produced.

"And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from morning until midday, before the men and women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." (Neh. viii. 3).

"He read". The priest's duty was not completely fulfilled in the sacrificial and ceremonial part of his service; it was also his duty to teach the people the word of God (Deut. xvii. 11; xxxiii. 10). The reading of the Scriptures is an integral part of all Christian ministry. In no service should it be relegated to a position that would even hint that it was but an appendage to the more important office of

preaching. Preaching may be likened to the building, but of what use are walls and roof without a foundation? "Till I come, give attendance to the reading," said Paul to Timothy. "Have ye never read?" "Did ye never read?" are questions that came many times to the lips of the Saviour. When Luke records the opening ministry of Christ, he tells us that "He stood up for to read" (Luke iv. 16). Just to show that the Hebrew conception of "reading" was a vivid, moving thing, and not a dull convention, look at some of the ways *Qara*, "to read", is translated.

- "Call". "And Adam called his wife's name Eve" (Gen. iii. 20).
 "Cry". "Cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished" (Isa. xl. 2).
 "Invite". "I have invited the people" (1 Sam. ix. 24).
 "Proclaim". "Proclaim liberty to the captives" (Isa. lxi. 1).
 "Preach". "Thou hast also appointed prophets to preach" (Neh. vi. 7).
 "Publish". "Because I will publish the name of the Lord" (Deut. xxxii. 3).

It will be seen that to fulfil all that "reading", when expressed by the Hebrew word *Qara*, means requires the work of the evangelist and of the man of God, apt to teach. In Nehemiah itself the word is seen to bare the meaning "preach" (Neh. vi. 7).

"And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose . . . and Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up." (Neh. viii. 4, 5).

For what purpose was the pulpit erected? Was it for the aggrandisement of the preacher, "for he was above all the people"? No, it was that the book should be opened "in the sight of all the people", and when the people stood up, as an act of reverence (Job xxix. 8), it was not to revere Ezra the Scribe, but the book from which he was about to read:

Before a word was read out of the book, "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." (Neh. viii. 6).

This is the only way to approach a revelation given by God to man. Any other veils its glory and obscures its meaning, so that men without faith and reverence may honestly say that they do not understand it neither can they see anything particularly elevating in it. "To him that hath shall be given."

The law of Moses was written in Hebrew, but many of those who now stood to hear Ezra read had been born in exile and spoke Chaldee. The older ones, who had spoken Hebrew in their youth, would, after the lapse of so many years find it difficult to follow, therefore others, principally the Levites, stood beside Ezra, and as he read the Hebrew scriptures, "caused the people to understand the law" (Neh. viii. 7). The comment is, "So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. viii. 8).

The Talmudic interpretation of the word "distinctly" is,

“translating and interpreting it in the Chaldee paraphrase” (*Companion Bible*) “For, from the days of Ezra, they used to have an interpreter in the synagogue, who interpreted to the people what the reader read; the reader read a verse and stopped, while the interpreter had interpreted it . . . this was the constant practice” (Maimonides). In the Jerusalem Talmud, the Gemarists ask, “Whence came the custom of having an interpreter? R. Zeora, in the name of R. Hananeel, saith from that place ‘They read in the book of the law’, that meaneth the reading that is in the original text, ‘distinctly’ that meaneth the exposition; ‘and caused to understand the reading’, that meaneth, the Masoreth, or point and accents”.

This but emphasizes the gift that we all possess to-day in being able to read in the tongue wherein we were born, the wonderful works of God. However true it may be that in many passages the Authorized Version fails to exhibit with clearness the intention of the original, let not these necessary failures of a version blind our eyes to the inestimable privilege we possess in the English Bible.

It is from the great day of the “Opened Book” that Israel dates the coming into being of the order of the Sopherim (Scribes), who set the text in order, a work that was completed by the Great Synagogue. The labours of the Sopherim upon the actual text of the Scriptures can be appreciated by the English reader who studies appendixes 30 to 34 of the *Companion Bible*.

It does not fall to our task to edit the text of the Scriptures or to attempt to divide it into chapter and verse—this has already been done—but it is still as necessary as ever to insist that whoever reads the Scriptures should read them “distinctly”. The word so translated *parash*, means “to distinguish”, “to define”, and is once translated “to sting” (Prov. xxiii. 32). Reading should be clear, distinct, with point in it; the very opposite of anything woolly or indefinite. One can hardly “call”, “cry”, “proclaim” or “publish” (as the word “read” is variously translated) without making the message clear and well-defined. The fact that some men of God and spiritual teachers are bad readers in nowise alters the fact that were they good readers they would be still more useful.

But there is more in reading the Scriptures than making oneself heard. It is what these men of Ezra did; they “gave the sense”. This refers to “understanding”, as the verb is translated in Nehemiah viii. 13. It is also translated “instruct” in Nehemiah ix. 20. If they are not understood, the Scriptures cannot be believed. If a man quote John iii. 16 to me in Chinese, I should be pardoned for not “believing” it because, while clearly hearing the sounds he made, they would convey no meaning.

The Pulpit in the Chapel of the Opened Book exists for this one purpose, to make plain the meaning of the Scriptures, whether in Gospel or Doctrine; whether in dispensational distinctions or in practice and just as Nehemiah’s labours and the attack of his enemies had this pulpit and opened book in view, so all our work finds its expression and realization in the same way.

We find that on the second day the "chief of the fathers" came to Ezra, in order that they might understand the word of the law. It seems evident that Ezra, seeing that it was the seventh month and that so much teaching was wrapped up in the feasts of Israel, turned to that part of the law that commanded Israel to dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. This the people gladly did and they could do so with understanding, for the dwelling in booths was a symbol of the day of release (Deut. xxxi. 10, cf. xv. 1), of that day when walled cities, with gates and bars, shall no more be necessary "but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it" (Micah iv. 4).

It is the earnest wish of all who are associated with the Berean Forward Movement that not only shall "the people" hear the Word of God from "The Pulpit of the Opened Book" but that the "chief of the fathers"—the teachers; the future leaders of the church; the ones who must know the truth and be able to make it known—that these, too, shall also use this place of testimony and find help in the understanding of the Word. To this end much prayer and thought has been given to the Training Classes, and the Correspondence Courses, and much prayer is asked concerning these Scriptural adjuncts from all who are of "like precious faith".

The remainder of the book of Nehemiah records the separation of Israel from the sons of the stranger, as a result of reading what God had called them to, and a covenant was sealed by Nehemiah, the priests, the Levites and the chief of the people which was to the effect that this law of separation, which was so imbedded in the book that had been read to them, should be put into practice by those that had heard.

In the closing chapter a fresh revelation of internal defection is made; an unholy alliance between Tobiah and the high priest (Neh. xiii. 4-8), the breaking of the sabbath by the vendors of fish and wares (xiii. 16-22), the marriage of Jews with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab, and the further complicity of Eliashib, the high priest, in that his son was son-in-law to Sanballat.

Upon his return to Jerusalem Nehemiah made short shrift with these troublers of Israel. He cast out Tobiah and all his "stuff" from the chamber which he had occupied in the courts of the house of God. He saw to it that the Levites received their portion and that the tithes were brought into the treasury and prevented the profanation of the sabbath day by traders. This he effected by causing the gates to be shut and by warning off the traders.

All this, and more, one may read in these stormy chapters, but our immediate task has been fulfilled. We have reached the heart of the record and the erection of the "Pulpit" with a "Purpose" and the "Opening" of the "Book" and thank the God of Nehemiah that none of the machinations of the Wicked One "caused the work to cease".