

## Nehemiah.

BY HOWARD CROSBY, D. D.

Joshua, Nehemiah, and Daniel stand forth as the most spotless characters in sacred history, of those whose lives are described at length. Of these three, no fault is recorded. They all lived in trying times which called for decided action, but maintained throughout the integrity of their souls. Nehemiah partook of the character of the other two. He was a commander of armed men, like Joshua, and he was a high state officer in a Gentile kingdom, like Daniel. He had the valor of the former, and the moral courage of the latter.

We are first introduced to him at Susa, where he occupied the lofty station of cupbearer to Artaxerxes (Longimanus), son of Xerxes, and king of Persia. Ninety years have passed since the first monarch of Artaxerxes' race permitted those of the Jews who wished, to return and build their temple and city. Only fifty thousand of the millions of the Captivity showed patriotism and piety enough to take advantage of this royal order with its large and liberal assistance. These rebuilt the temple under the guidance of Joshua, the high-priest, and Zerubabel (of the old royal line) as civil governor. But with the temple rebuilt, they have lost their enthusiasm. The walls and fortifications of the city are in the ruin and dilapidation in which the Babylonians left them, a hundred and forty-two years before. Instead of keeping themselves separate from the heathen tribes who press upon them, especially from the side of Samaria, they are yielding to the pernicious influences of these pagan foreigners, and making alliances with them in marriage and commerce. Both the temporal and spiritual conditions of the Jews at Jerusalem are sad for a pious soul to contemplate. Nehemiah, at Susa, is so pained by the special information he received on these points from his brother Hanani, who has lately arrived from the long journey to Jerusalem, that his sorrow interferes with the cheerful conduct of his office in the royal palace, and arrests the attention of the monarch. Then follow the inquiry on the part of the king and the explanation on the part of Nehemiah. The result is that Nehemiah is sent as tirshatha or governor of the Jewish colony in Judea, with special privileges from the king to assist his feeble compatriots. It is very probable that Nehemiah was of the Jewish royal family, and that some of the branches of this family were retained in the East by Cyrus and his successors for state reasons, while the rest were allowed to return to Jerusalem. This would account for the presence of so godly a man as Nehemiah at Susa, when we should have expected him to be in Judea, amid the religious privileges of the temple.

The journey from Susa to Jerusalem by Tadmor, or by Tiphshah, is over a thousand miles long, and at the usual rate of oriental traveling would occupy at least forty-five days. With the natural causes to retard so long a journey, we may safely call it a two months' travel.

Ezra, with his caravan of seven thousand persons, thirteen years previously, was four months on his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. Nehemiah, as a man of high rank, was escorted by a body of horsemen, who probably continued with him at Jerusalem as a guard of honor.

Oriental governments have never exercised much control over the internal strifes of nationalities beneath their jurisdiction. So long, as the provinces pay their tribute, little effort has been made to preserve peace or ensure justice.

So we find that with all Nehemiah's endorsement by the king, the surrounding provinces, composed of

Moabites, Ammonites, Arabs, and the mongrel Samaritans, could annoy and persecute the Jews without any attempt at interference on the part of the central authority. It was a gigantic task that lay before Nehemiah. A great city was to be fortified in the presence of its bitterest foes, and that with his own people largely indifferent, or in sympathy with the enemy. To rouse the Jews from their apathy, to fill them with a pious patriotism, to give them zeal and courage to expel the corruption, and defy the heathen plotters, was far harder than to conduct an open war at the head of a willing army. It is far easier to lead soldiers than to lead the hearts and thoughts of a supine people.

With wonderful magnetism, added to his indomitable perseverance, this pious hero pushed his mighty task and arrayed the chiefs of the people (even including those most hostile in heart to his holy enterprise) in solid phalanx for building the walls and guarding the workers from attack. With sleepless vigilance he watched every point of his work, urged every man by his example and precept, creating emulation and enthusiasm where before all was apathy, and so astounded the outside foes by the rapid accomplishment of his purpose.

In the midst of this energetic pressure of the wall-building, when any other man would have absolved himself from thinking of any other duty, his grand soul undertook a thorough reform of the social life of Jerusalem. Debts that had been fastened upon the people by the fraud, greed, and violence of the nobles, were annulled, mortgages freed, slavery abolished, and all alliance by marriage with the heathen prohibited.

In all this he acted in no timid or halting manner, but with irresistible decision, yielding not an inch to the wealth or nobility of those, whom he rebuked.

When the high-priest's family and those who bore the sacred title of prophets resisted him, he hesitated not for a moment, but swept down upon these exalted personages like an avalanche, and crushed their opposition by his promptness and decision. When he cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber of the house of God, which the depraved high-priest had prepared for the Ammonite, and when he chased the high-priest's son from him because he had married Sanballat's daughter, he was a grand picture of holy indignation and godly firmness, commanding our admiration and applause.

With all this heroic vigor and executive power, Nehemiah was a man of tender sensibilities. His heart was touched with the sufferings of his poor brethren; and in his movement for their relief he refused himself to be a burden to the state, while he freely poured out his own stores for the support of others.

His prayers to God, in which he calls upon the divine eye to behold the wickedness of his enemies and his own righteousness, are not revengeful nor conceited, but the earnest prayers of a true soul in the midst of fierce trials, where no false charity or false humility can have place. They are like the ejaculations of David and Paul under similar circumstances, the language of a brave spirit that trusts in God's truth.

It is interesting to see how admirably the Book of Nehemiah tells the story of the soul's renewal.

In the first chapter is the conviction and confession of sin and wretchedness, in the second the determination to rebuild with God's grace, in the third the actual rebuilding of the soul's defenses in sanctification, in the fourth the attacks upon the soul from without, in the fifth the assaults from within, in the sixth the sly temptations of the adversary in the guise of reasonableness, in the seventh the successful accomplishment of the

spiritual work and ordering of the soul in godliness, in the eighth the study of the word, in the ninth the Christian's faith confessing its weakness, in the tenth the covenant relation emphasized, in the eleventh the systematizing of the advanced soul in the godly life, in the twelfth the thankful acknowledgment of God in everything, and in the thirteenth the sad exhibition of the Christian's fall and need of the renewed influences of the Spirit.

When, on a close examination of the book, we see how exactly this outline is filled up, we can hardly believe that such a spiritual application was not intended in the recorded history.

It is probable that Bunyan took his "Mansoul" from the study of this book. To one who will read it devoutly, there is a power beneath that of the interesting narrative, which will instruct and comfort the heart amid the adversities of this earthly state, teaching it of the all-sufficiency of God in the utter weakness of man. —S. S. Times.

## Authors' Homes.

Some of our readers may remember the lecture upon Dickens, delivered by Edmund Yates on the occasion of his visit to this country, and the picture of the house and grounds which he exhibited on the stage. It was very characteristic. The house, a plain, substantial brick structure, fronted on a lawn on which a merry party of ladies and gentlemen were enjoying the excitement of flirtation and croquet; against an angle of the house leaned its master, enjoying the evident enjoyment of his guests and sipping a glass of wine. The picture was extremely characteristic, and familiarized those who saw it with Dickens and his work completely.

This property was left to his eldest son and namesake, whose recent business failures have necessitated a sale of the house and grounds which will thus pass from the Dickens family within nine years of the owner's death. However, such a fate seems to be the usual one so far as great literary men are concerned. The house where Shakespeare lived at Stafford-on-Avon is now owned by the corporation, but it ceased to belong to the family very soon after his death. Newstead-abbey, the home of Lord Byron's domestic life, still exists, but is owned by none of his blood. At Twickenham still stands, and such cockney excursionists as know anything about the author of the "Dunciad" continue to steal wands from the willows which overhang the bank of the Thames, but none of his family have had a title to it for many a long year; Burn's house with all its historic traditions remains standing, but it is a tavern, not the nursery of some of the warmest and purest sentiments that ever found expression in verse; Smollett's house in Dumbartonshire is still in possession of his family, and forms an exception to the general rule. Thackeray's house in Chelsea, is still occupied by his family, if we mistake not, but the habits of the genial author of "Pendennis" were scarcely of the domestic type which would throw much sentiment around his dwelling. He was essentially a club man, which Dickens was not. Indeed, Dickens was luxurious in his domestic habits to a remarkable degree, extravagant in his sumptuous style of living, in his furniture, his personal adornments, and in the additions and improvements made at Gadshill, while Thackeray was extremely simple. Grassmere where the "Lakes," as Louthy, Wordsworth and their friends were called by Byron, will ever be identified in thought with these two poets, whose simple, tranquil lives are pictured in their verse, but De Quincy and Wilson, who entered largely into the associations of the place, went their respective ways, the one to frequent the country at large and be the welcome guest of

the other, and Willson to Edinburgh to fill the chair of professor of moral philosophy at the University. The house in which Paradise Lost was written has vanished long ago, and all we know of it is that Milton sat at its door smoking, with his favorite daughter and amanuensis beside him. Rousseau, Jeffery, Hood, Charles Lamb had no homes in which their great works were written, in the same sense that Dickens and Scott had, and the rooms in attic stories or tenement houses have been profaned over and over again, no doubt, just as Abbotsford, the residence of Scott, was turned over to strangers when financial difficulties pinched its owner. Contrasted with these is the home of Washington Irving, at Irvington, still held by his family; Tennyson's modest cottage in the Isle of Wight, Longfellow's house in Cambridge, the residence of Emerson, and the lovely villa at Soslyn in which William Cullen Bryant spent the long warm evening of his days.

As a matter of fact, genius leaves few material monuments behind it, except where it is breathed into marble or on canvas. True, that Athenodorus and his father live in the Laocoon, and Phidias, Michael Angelo. Da Vinci, Rubens and Christopher Wren are still before us in their works. But of their active lives, apart from their labors like most of the geniuses of the world they have left no trace. It is to be regretted that literary men, either because of their indifference to material possessions or their inability in most instances to acquire them, should, except in their writings, leave so few monuments, for who, as "Satan" Montgomery expressed it—

Can tread the ground by genius often trod  
Nor feel a nature more akin to God?

To say that they leave no monument would be untrue, for words like Horace's are "monuments more durable than brass," but their material traces are speedily obliterated. Hence the regret one feels at learning that a landmark so famous as Gadshill in the history of English literature is to be removed, for Gadshill without the name of Dickens and the famous sortie by Falstaff and his companion cutpurse of the blood, is nothing. In a minor way it was something german to Holland House, where literary genius made its headquarters; where Greville tells us of his meeting with Macaulay; and where poets, novelists and statesmen met on equal ground. Its master on his death-bed contributed at least one epigram, illustrative of the aspirations of the house:

Nephew of Fox and friend of Gray,  
Enough my meed of fame;  
If those who knew me best can say  
I tarnished neither name.

—Brooklyn Eagle.

## How the Sermon Helped Kathie.

BY ELIZABETH WINTHROP.

In a prominent pew of a fashionable city church sat Kathie Spenser, on the last Sunday morning of the year. Outside it was dark December, with a frosty, leaden sky, and a sharp, cutting wind. Inside all was light and warmth, and Kathie herself looked as fresh and dainty as an apple-blossom in spring.

As she fixed her great, dancing, brown eyes on the minister, and listened intently to the sermon, they grew strangely soft, and an earnest, thoughtful look stole over the laughing face. Kathie loved her pastor. He had guided her into the fold of the Good Shepherd, and, when there, he never forgot that the lambs needed to be fed as well as the sheep. His sermons were sufficiently practical and forcible to make his older hearers wise; but they were also so simple that a young girl of sixteen, like Kathie, could carry home with her many thoughts and suggestions to help her in the duties of her every day life.

Kathie made her way into the open air with much more haste than usual, when the service was over. Not even

waiting for her dearly beloved Kitty Miles, she rushed precipitately home. The new hat, which had occupied all her thought and attention before the morning service, was thrown carelessly aside; the gloves were wrung from her nervous fingers; a fresh, crisp note-book, with purple covers, which lay on the table in her own room, was eagerly seized, and Miss Kathie sat down to remember what she could of the sermon.

The little note-book, together with a prettily bound volume of Thomas à Kempis, had been two of Kathie's Christmas gifts from her mother. The little note accompanying them had said:

"Will dear Kathie put the Thomas à Kempis with her Bible, and read thoughtfully a few paragraphs in each every day. The little note-book might be used to jot down any helpful ideas which may come to her from sermons, books, or real life."

This idea of keeping a note-book was an inspiration to a girl of Kathie's enthusiastic temperament, and she had been on the *qui vive*, ever since she had received it, to find something worthy of its pages. From Mr. H—'s sermon, she was sure she could cull some gems of thought; hence her eager attention, and her haste to reach home before the best thoughts had escaped her memory.

Let us peep over her shoulder and see what she writes.

1. Text: We spend our years as a tale that is told.—Psalm 90: 9.

2. Meaning of text: We spend our years in a self-absorbed, absent-minded service. We do not awake to the realities of life, or think what we can do for others.

3. Remark: Each year stamps the quality of our character.

4. Remark: The best preparation for future emergencies is quiet fidelity to present duty.

5. Remark: In the retrospect, the Psalmist says, "we spend our years." In looking forward to the future, he says, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

When her work was done, Kathie looked over the neatly written page with great satisfaction at its appearance.

"There" she said to herself; "I think I have done well to remember so much; and it all applies to me, every bit! I know I am absorbed in myself, and do not wake up to the realities of life, or think what I can do for others. Thomas à Kempis, too, says so much about self-forgetfulness that it just frightens me! I wonder if my wise little mother didn't give me the book for that very reason. Oh, I must learn to number my days, and apply my heart unto wisdom!"

Here Kathie gave a deep sigh, as if, like the patriarch Jacob, "the days of the years of her pilgrimage" had been one hundred and thirty years, instead of sixteen.

Then the busy thoughts ran on again: "I know, too, I'm always planning for great emergencies. It would be so grand to be a visitor of prisons, like Elizabeth Fry; or to go about explaining the Bible to people, like Miss Smiley. Even to have a class in the mission school would be something; but Mr. H— says that the best preparation for all these things is quiet fidelity to present duty."

"Then I suppose the next question is, What is my 'present duty'?" Oh, I know! I'm so often late to lunch, or my hair isn't neat, or I'm too lively for Sunday. I will just fix my hair a little, and try to be prompt at lunch, and somewhat subdued, besides. That will please, papa, I know."

"Now, what is the next 'present duty'?" thought Kathie, when lunch was over. "Oh, dear! must I begin to study my Sunday school lessons now? It does seem as if it was enough to study all the week; but if