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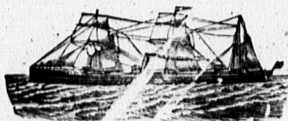
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### S. S. LESSON

#### LESSON III. OCTOBER 15. THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY.

Ezra 1: 1-11; 2: 64-70.

#### GOLDEN TEXT.

"He retaineth not his anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy."

—Micah 7: 18.

#### POINTED SUGGESTIONS.

God honors His word. Those who are His faithful messengers shall come to honor. Jeremiah had been despised when he foretold the breaking of the exile of Israel and the return of the captives to Jerusalem after seventy years, but the hour has struck and the genuineness of the prophecy and the honor of the prophet are established.

Ezra, the great student, and statesman and preacher, from whose records the story of the home-coming Jews is taken, has a favorite expression in telling about it. It is, "the hand of the Lord." Take a look through the Book of Ezra and notice how repeatedly and reverently it is said that this and that was done because of "the hand of the Lord." It will encourage and strengthen you.

The lesson-text uses another expression which is precious to think about. "Jehovah stirred up the spirit," v. 1, 5. The Lord knows how to make instruments of service out of those who even know how to serve Him. But blessed are they who respond to the promptings of good which they receive, for they always proceed from God.

There had been nothing in the conduct or condition of the exiles in Babylon to bring about the fulfilment of the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah. Many of them mourned when they remembered Zion, but they had become almost solidly content to take it out in mourning—official, perfunctory, if not hypocritical mourning.

A large number failed to respond to the privilege of return which Cyrus proclaimed and provided for. They snuggled, with all the limitations they suffered, of their lot in Babylon was sufficient to hold them there in preference to the perils of the journey or the prospects of the rocky slopes of Jerusalem. They were getting along without a temple or an altar, and they could do so still. The non-church-going habit was upon them, and they have thousands of modern successors—listless, indifferent, backslidden, godless successors who remain away from the place of worship, heedless of the church-going bell. When will their hearts be stirred?

Nevertheless, Cyrus responded to his heart-stirrings from God, and many took advantage of his generous proclamation, being moved by the same promptings of the spirit. Preparations for the freedom and joy of the home-going ensued. All peril and discomfort were as nothing to the release from exile and the privilege of worship and the accomplishment of the word of Jehovah.

Busy days are those. John Wesley had his work so definitely planned; and kept his work so thoroughly in hand under the sway of one God, that he said he would not change it at all in view of the possibility that any day was to be his last day on earth. It is more than likely that most men would alter many of their plans for today if it was believed to be the last and crowd it with something different.

But busy as home-going days are in their preparation, it is well when all the strings of Babylon are cut. For this reason it is good policy, as well as good religion, not to have too many strings to hold us to Babylon. Better for us when they pull strongly the other way. Thank God for every influence, and prompting, and pull heavenward, God-ward. It is only with such that the statement holds good: "With songs to Zion they return, Contending for their native heaven."

### METHODIST CONFERENCE

(Continued From Page 1.)

and 1322 parsonages. The financial standing of the Church is shown by the fact that the churches are valued at \$14,874,000, parsonages, \$2,520,000, colleges, \$2,543,000, schools \$214,000 and book and publishing houses \$130,000. These, with other properties, constitute a total of \$21,224,000, an increase in the quadrennium of close to \$5,000,000. The total debt is about \$2,400,000 and insurance carried amounts to close to \$10,000,000. The general board of missions has an income of about \$11,500,000 and expends about \$1,300,000.

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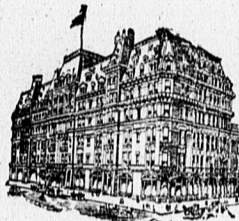
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