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HANDBOOK OF THE BIBLE

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THE TEACHER'S
HANDBOOK OF THE BIBLE

A SYLLABUS OF BIBLE READINGS
AND CONNECTING EPITOMES
WITH COMMENTS

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

BY

JOSEPH PULLIBLANK, M.A.

FORMERLY SCHOLAR OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



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DEDICATION.

TO THE
REV. JOSEPH BARBER LIGHTFOOT, D.D.

CANON OF ST. PAUL'S AND LADY MARGARET'S READER IN
DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

MY DEAR DR LIGHTFOOT,

I dedicate this little book to you as a tribute to your zeal, not only for academical, but also for national education; as a mark of sincere respect for your office; and, if last not least, as an expression of earnest gratitude for benefits received from you during the last ten years.

I am

Yours respectfully,

JOSEPH PULLIBLANK.

Aug. 21, 1876.

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PREFACE.

I UNDERTOOK the preparation of this Handbook of the Bible at the request of a person deeply interested in education, who thought that a book written on the plan I have adopted would aid teachers in giving more system and also more life to religious instruction in our schools.

My object has been—to help the teacher in bringing out, in a course of lessons of moderate length, the fundamental truths which are generally held by the Christian Churches; in giving a continuous outline of the Sacred History; and in showing the mutual relations of the various Books of the Bible.

The work contains a syllabus of Scriptural readings with comments thereon, the readings from the Old Testament being connected together by epitomes of the parts essential to the thread of the history, but too long to be read in full. It will be followed shortly by a series of questions adapted for class teaching or examinations. The syllabus includes the parts of the Old Testament most suitable to my general design, the Gospel of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles. I have added brief accounts of the sufferings and triumphs of the early Christian martyrs, whose heroic examples of faith and self-sacrifice cannot fail to exert a holy and inspiring influence upon the young.

The nature and style of the comments call for a few words of explanation. Although, in the general arrangement of the book, I have aimed at making it of use to

teachers in the public elementary schools, I have not limited myself to selections of Scripture and comments exclusively suitable to a very early age. The attempt to adapt Bible teaching to any particular class of scholars tends to lead a writer into an ingenious rather than a natural treatment of his subject, and, furthermore, the young will often exert themselves most earnestly to understand what is not too manifestly written for their exclusive use. I have, therefore, in all cases, tried to suggest the truths, illustrations, and information which seemed to me most appropriate and of primary importance in connection with the passage of Scripture under consideration, leaving it to the teacher to simplify the wording, when necessary, to amplify illustrations, or to omit any comments which are clearly beyond the understanding of the scholars. In regard to the exercise of this discretion I must, however, add that I think we generally err on the side of under-estimating the capacity of the young to grasp religious truths, and that it is far better occasionally to shoot over the heads of part of a class than to keep at such a level as not to call out the thoughtfulness of the cleverer scholars in it.

I have suggested in each lesson only one or two thoughts, knowing that if a variety of thoughts be presented at once to the human mind it is seldom that any of them will take root. This explanation will account for what in many places must appear to be an insufficiency of comment.

From these remarks it will be seen that what I desire for my book is not that it should be a substitute for, but a help to, the teacher. If I shall have succeeded in lightening the labour of any hard-worked teacher, by suggesting to him the way in which he may bring the Bible lessons home to the understandings and consciences of his pupils, my end will have been fully attained.

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THE order in which I recommend the teacher to use these lessons, is as follows: To go first through the lessons from the Old and New Testaments concurrently, in the order of their respective successions, taking two from the former for every one of the latter, and, after going through all the lessons in this manner, to begin the New Testament lessons alone, and go through them a second time. The advantage of this plan is, that it secures the New Testament lessons being taken twice, the second time with all the advantages in understanding them which a knowledge of the outlines of the Old Testament History will have given to the scholars. Even in schools in which religious instruction is given daily, I recommend that not more than three lessons be taken each week, so as to secure an hour or two at the end of the week for recapitulation of and examination on the lessons given in the earlier part. If these suggestions be adopted, and three lessons taken weekly, the whole time occupied by the course will be ninety-seven weeks.

In the syllabus, I have marked with an asterisk the lessons which are unsuitable to younger scholars, as likely to be beyond their comprehension.

Errata.

Page 23, line 1, for viii. read xviii. Page 394, line 1, for xxi. read xxii.

HANDBOOK OF THE BIBLE.

LESSON 1.

Introductory.

THE word 'Bible' is derived from a Greek word which means simply 'a book.' When, therefore, we speak of the collection of Sacred Writings as *the Bible*, the word which we use describes it as the Book of books, far exceeding all others in value, because it contains the declaration of God's will and the principles of Christian faith and duty.

The Bible is divided into two parts, called the Old and New Testaments. The word 'Testament' means a covenant or agreement, and is applied to the two parts of the Bible because they contain God's promises to mankind, and state the conditions upon which they are made.

Parts of the Bible were translated at a very early time into the language spoken in England. Among other early translators it must interest us to know that Alfred the Great, in the ninth century, translated into Anglo-Saxon, the tongue then spoken in this country, parts of the Psalms and extracts from other books of the Bible, for the use of his own children. Anticipating the time when the whole Bible should be translated he expressed the wish that all the freeborn youth in his kingdom should be able to read the English Scriptures.

Some hundreds of years passed away before King Alfred's wish could be fulfilled. Translations, more or less perfect, of the Scriptures into English were made from the fourteenth century onwards, and most of these had some influence on the translations which are now in use.

The translation of the Bible called the 'Authorised Version,' which has been used by all English Protestants for the last two hundred and fifty years, was made in the early part of the seventeenth century, in the reign of James I. It was made by fifty-four scholars chosen by the King; and they divided the work among them, each labouring separately at the part he had undertaken,

but all meeting together to compare and amend their translations. Another version, called the 'Douai Version,' is preferred by our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen. This translation was made by a number of English Roman Catholics who were settled in the French towns of Rheims and Douai, and was, like the Authorised Version, completed early in the seventeenth century.

One thing which must strike us all in reading the Bible is the brevity with which it is written. This brevity is attained in the historical parts by the omission of all particulars not absolutely required to make the outline of events clear. We are often told in a few lines of great events, the record of which, even in a briefly written history of the present day, would fill many pages. In most of the sayings of Scripture the same brevity is secured by what is called conciseness, that is, by putting a wonderful amount of meaning in a very few words.

Our Saviour's sayings are beyond all others remarkable for conciseness and plainness. Take, for instance, that in which He declares that all sins begin in the thoughts, and that it is sin which separates us from God. The saying referred to is: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' As an example of great conciseness in an Old Testament saying, let us take the expression of these same truths contained in one of the Proverbs. It runs: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' In both of these passages *the heart* is looked upon as the source of all thought and feeling; both of them, therefore, teach us in the fewest words truths of the utmost necessity for us to understand and remember.

The brevity of the Bible writings will not, however, surprise us, if we remember that all the books of the Bible were written for the purpose of being made very widely known to people of all classes and conditions of life. Had they been written with much more fulness, most of these writings would have been very long, and the number of persons who could have been taught their contents would consequently have been very small. The necessity for brevity will appear still plainer to us when we remember further that the various books of the Bible were written long before printing was invented, and when every copy had to be made by hand. In those olden times the multiplying of copies of books was a long, costly work, and only very few people could afford to buy them. The knowledge possessed by most people was, therefore, limited to what they could be taught by word of mouth, and could carry away in their memory.

One or two facts may assist us to understand better what a great difference in this matter the invention of printing has made. A very few men can now, with the help of a first-class printing-

machine, print off in two or three hours 56,000 copies of a newspaper of such a size that it would take a rapid writer 112 hours to copy it once by hand.

Putting all these things together we can understand why the Bible does not supply us with many particulars of historical events, such as we might otherwise have expected to learn from it.

These facts as to the brevity of the Scripture writings have been dwelt upon in this lesson because they lead to an important truth, which ought to be deeply impressed upon our minds.

It is this: patience and care are necessary for the study of Scripture; we should seek instruction from all who are able to help us in that study, and should think well over all that we learn by it. In these days, when, by the art of printing, writings can be very easily multiplied, writers use many more words than would have been used in the olden times to say the same things, and we are apt to expect that everything which it is important for us to know will be told to us at great length. This expectation may lead us into hasty and careless reading of some of the shortest but weightiest passages in the Bible, and so prevent our discovering the rich treasures they contain. If, avoiding this error, we conscientiously try through life to master its meaning and to follow its lessons, the longer we live the plainer will it become to us. Often in some hour of bitter sorrow or of sore temptation we shall find some passage, never before fully valued, breaking in upon us in a flood of new light, and bringing with it unspeakable comfort and support. It is at such times that we shall be able to understand thoroughly the meaning of the title given to the Bible when it is spoken of as 'The Word of God.'

LESSON 2.

The Old Testament..

BEFORE we begin reading parts of the Old Testament it is well to know a little about it as a *whole*. Remember, then, that it was not written all at one time, but in separate parts, and at very different dates: between the writing of the oldest and the latest of the books there is a difference in time of nearly a thousand years. The collection of the books of the Old Testament into what is called the Canon was completed about two hundred years before the coming of Christ, by the Jews, whose division of the books is retained in printed copies of the Hebrew Bible. They counted three great classes¹ of sacred writings—viz.:

I. *The Law* (Torah); that is, the five books of Moses.

¹ In Luke xxiv. 44 are the words: 'The Law and the Prophets, and the Psalms,' referring to this threefold division, and thus covering the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures.

II. *The Prophets* (Nebiim), divided into two sections.

- (1.) The former Prophets—viz., Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.
- (2.) The latter Prophets—viz., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor Prophets in one book.

III. *The Writings* (Kethubim), partly poetical, partly historical, partly prophetic—viz.,

- (1.) Psalms, Proverbs, Job.
- (2.) Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes.
- (3.) Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles.

Of these it is certain that the first, that is, the Law, was generally, if not always, written on a separate roll of parchment, and it is probable that the others were also kept separate in like manner. The language of the books of the Old Testament in general is Hebrew; but a few chapters in some of the later books, as Daniel and Ezra, are written in the Chaldean tongue, with which the Jews, during their Captivity in Babylon, became better acquainted than with their own Hebrew. The greater part of the contents of the Old Testament is historical. The Bible begins with the early history of the world, and goes on after Abraham with that of the Israelites to the time of their Captivity.

Having now heard something of the general character of the Old Testament, and having been told how it was written, let us think seriously of the words in which our Saviour tells us the main lessons we are to derive from all its teaching. If we keep these words in our memories, they will help us to understand the religious and moral teaching of the Old Testament, and will prevent our misunderstanding some difficult parts. (St. Matthew, xxii. 34-40, inclusive):—‘But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the Law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ ‘The Law and the Prophets’ contain the greater part of the Old Testament, and, according to the verses just quoted from St. Matthew’s Gospel, the two principles which they enforce are love to God and love to man. These lessons are taught in very different ways in different parts of the Scriptures; sometimes direct commandments are given, as in Exodus and Deuteronomy; sometimes the dreadful results which follow disobedience are described, as in the case of

Adam and Eve; and sometimes we have examples of the holy and honoured lives of those who obeyed both commandments, as in the cases of Abraham, Moses, and Samuel. Sometimes the books themselves which convey these lessons are historical accounts of nations, of families, or of individuals; sometimes they are collections of poems or of wise sayings in the form of proverbs; and sometimes they consist of the warnings and instructions delivered by the great Hebrew teachers or prophets. But, no matter what the form of the teaching, or the character of the books may be, the two great lessons of love to God and love to man run through all, and so our Saviour, in the words just read, very justly puts them together as summing up the duty of man. We cannot rightly love God, or serve Him truly, without showing our love in kindness and truthfulness towards all our fellow-men, towards our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters, our school-fellows and acquaintances; nor can we really do all the good we might do to men unless we do it because God has commanded us to do it, and because out of love to Him we try to do His will. If we study our Bibles with reverence and care, we shall understand better and better as we go on how these two great lessons should affect our conduct; and at last, in the history of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall find, not only the story of the greatest example of obedience to those two commandments, but the strongest reasons why gratitude and love for all that is holy and true and noble should urge us to follow it.

LESSON 3.

Read Genesis i. 1—25 inclusive.

THE name of this book, 'Genesis,' is a Greek word, which means origin or beginning. The first chapter of the Book of Genesis is the oldest written history we possess. Such a book, whatever it contained, would be very interesting and important, but this book is doubly so, for it begins with a lesson not only about the world, but about God. Its first words are, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' All that we see around us, the earth on which we walk, the sea on which we sail, the clouds which give us rain, the food we eat, the material of the clothes we wear, the sun, whose light and heat make our life pleasant, and the very distant stars, whose twinkling we can just catch on a clear night—all these were made by Him. Nothing which is, came by itself, or became what it is, without Him; but all things were made, and all are preserved, by laws which He has appointed. It is to teach us this, very probably, that the history of the Creation is divided into parts, each corresponding to the work of one day or one period of time. It was all done in order.

No part of the Old Testament exhibits more clearly than this chapter the conciseness of the Scripture writings. In twenty-five short verses we are told of the making of all things that exist, except God, the Creator of all things, and man. Notice particularly how simple are the words in which the first creative thought of God is described:—‘And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.’ Longinus, a great heathen critic—that is, one who writes on the meaning and use of words, etc.—said that these simple words were the most sublime in any literature. This conciseness and grand simplicity at the very beginning of the Bible, upon a subject so deeply interesting as the wonderful work of Creation, will help us much to see the whole purpose of the Scriptures that follow. This first chapter of Genesis gives us very little to satisfy our curiosity with regard to the things around us; it does not profess to teach us astronomy, geology, botany, or any other of the natural sciences. The Bible simply declares God’s *right* to the government of the world, because He created and approved the things of nature, and then it takes its place at once as the Book which offers us guidance for our lives, and which promises to make plain to all of us God’s laws for our conduct towards Him and towards our fellow-creatures. The chapter shows us, in several places, God’s delight in His works. We read, after the account of each separate act of creation, ‘And God saw that it was good.’

It is interesting to notice that when living things, whether plants or animals, are spoken of, it is said that they were made ‘after their kind.’ These three words are very important indeed, for they mean that God not only made the first specimens single plants or single animals, of each sort, but also that He gave them power to produce others like themselves. For example, a grain of wheat produces an ear of wheat, and each grain in the ear will produce wheat and nothing else; a hen’s egg produces a chicken, and not any other bird. The wheat and the hen are ‘after their kind.’

The power of God manifested in creation, and the unchangeableness of His laws, have been so deeply felt by many of the writers of the Old Testament that they have been unable to express in prose all that they wished to express, and therefore they have burst out into such poetry as is contained in the 38th chapter of the Book of Job and the 104th Psalm. These passages are too long to be quoted here, but there are three verses of the 119th Psalm which plainly refer to the subject of the present lesson. They are these: ‘For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. Thou hast established the earth and it abideth. They continue this day according to Thine ordinances: for all are Thy servants.’ Whatever, therefore,

gives us pleasure or benefit of any kind was made by God; and it is only when we use such good things with moderation that we fitly show our gratitude, our reverence, and our love to Him.

LESSON 4.

Read Genesis i. 26—ii. 3.

THE teaching of our last lesson may well be summed up in the words of St. John:—‘All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.’ The passage of Scripture just read carries on the lesson, and shows us that what is true of things is true of persons also. The difference between us and the plants and animals is that we are persons; we have understanding and will. The account given in the Bible of the creation of man is therefore to be very carefully studied, for it contains much instruction for us about ourselves.

Milton, in his great poem ‘Paradise Lost,’ after describing the creation of the plants and animals, says:—

There wanted yet the masterwork, the end
Of all yet made, a creature, who, not prone
And brute as other creatures, but endued
With sanctity of reason, might erect
His stature, and upright with front serene,
Govern the rest, self-knowing.

How this want in creation was supplied is what we learn from the passage of the Bible read to-day. We learn from it the great truth that ‘God created man in His own image.’ It is, no doubt, difficult for us to take in the full meaning of these few weighty words; but one thing is certain, and that is, that the more fully we understand them, the harder will it be for us to wander from the paths of duty. We must remember that ‘God is a Spirit,’ and that, having made us in His own likeness—that is, with spiritual faculties enabling us to understand His will—He expects us to ‘worship Him in spirit and in truth.’ We must rule our lives in harmony with our higher spiritual nature, and not allow ourselves to become the slaves of those lower appetites and impulses which we have in common with the beasts that perish. So long as we try honestly to do what we know we ought to do, we are trying to live like creatures made in the image of God; but when we do what we know is wrong, we dishonour ourselves, and destroy the likeness of our souls to God. The first man and woman were told by God that they should ‘have dominion over every living thing.’ Very often, men and women, as we say, ‘make beasts of themselves,’ or ‘behave like brutes;’ but in reality their conduct makes them worse than the brutes, for the brutes live as they

were meant to live, while men and women who live shamefully show that they do not care at all for God, or for that likeness to Him in which and for which they were created.

At the end of the first chapter of Genesis are certain words which repeat in a stronger form a statement we have already noticed. They are these: 'God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.' Now it is because we are made in the image of God that we also can see beauty and order in the things around us. Things which are made are not only good in themselves, but each is fitted for its purpose, and fitness is the chief part of beauty. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes says of God's creation: 'He hath made everything beautiful in its time.' Sir Thomas Browne, an English writer of the beginning of the seventeenth century, has the following passage on this subject: 'I hold there is a general beauty in the works of God, and therefore no deformity in any kind or species of creature whatsoever. I cannot tell by what logic we call a toad, a bear, or an elephant ugly; they being created in those outward shapes and figures which best express the actions of their inward forms, and having passed that general visitation of God, who saw that all He had made was good—that is, conformable to His will, which abhors deformity, and is the rule of order and beauty. . . . To speak yet more narrowly, there never was anything ugly or misshapen but the chaos; wherein, notwithstanding, there was no deformity, because no form: it was not yet impregnate with the voice of God.'

NOTE.—The consideration of the meaning and use of the Sabbath is postponed to what, it is believed, will be a better place for entering upon it, viz. in connection with the Mosaic legislation on the Sabbath *day*, and the Sabbatic and Jubilee *years*.

LESSON 5.

Read Genesis ii. 3—25.

THE second chapter of Genesis gives us another account of the Creation of Man, containing some interesting facts which we could not find out from the first account. The following is an explanation of a few of these additional facts:—

1. Our last lesson taught us that God made man; this lesson tells us more of *how* God made him. His body, we are told first, was formed 'out of the dust of the ground;' and it is well, perhaps, to know that there is nothing in our bodies which cannot be

¹ In the English Bible (Authorised Version) we find 'his time.' When the translation which we use was made, the word 'his' was employed

more often than 'its' as the neuter possessive. In this case (Ecclesiastes iii. 11) the sense shows that the neuter is meant.

found elsewhere. How wonderful is the power and wisdom of God, who has used in our bodies the same materials which He has used to make the rocks, the trees, and the sea! And then, when the body was made, God gave it life; it is by His power that each of us is a living soul.

The word Adam, which is used as the name of the first man, is said to be connected with a Hebrew word which means 'red earth,' and thus reminds us of the earth out of which the first man was formed.

2. We are taught, moreover, that when God had made man, He put him in a place prepared for him, where there was plenty of food to support his life. And then, at the very beginning, man was given some work. God's first commandment to man was that he was not to be idle. He was to dress, or cultivate, and keep the garden. This is very important to remember. Many of us, when we have work to do, are disposed to grumble and complain, and to think that we would prefer having nothing to do; but that is very wrong and very foolish; work is what God intended at the first for all men, even before that great change in man's condition which we shall soon read about. If the man who had done no wrong and knew no wrong needed to be employed, we need it much more; for the useful employment of our hands and our head keeps our hands from mischief and our minds from evil thoughts.

3. When this work was given to man, God gave him also a commandment in words. He was not to eat of the fruit of one particular tree, and was told that if he did eat of it he would surely die. We cannot understand why such a commandment was given, but we can understand something which is more important to us. Obedience to God is the thing which makes *true* human life; if we wilfully disobey Him, our life is no better than the lives of the beasts. All through the Bible obedience is described as our first duty, and disobedience the sin most severely punished.

4. Lastly, we are told of two great gifts of God, which should have made man love God, and obey Him from love and gratitude, not from fear of death. The first of these gifts was the gift of speech, which was first used by Adam in giving names to all the animals. We, who learn to speak from one another—we hardly know how—very seldom think that speech is anything wonderful; but if we think about it, and try to fancy how we could live without some means of telling our wants and thoughts to each other, we shall find that it is a most wonderful thing—a gift worthy of God who gave it. The remembrance of this ought to keep our mouths closed when we are inclined to speak evil or false words, for when we use such words we misuse God's great gift.

But, although the power of speech made Adam fit for society,

there was no creature fit to be a companion for him. He could be kind to the animals, but they could not satisfy his desire for companionship. Therefore God made a helpmate for him, namely, the first woman, whose creation is told us in the passage read to-day. The words in which the creation of woman is described are very hard to understand, but the meaning of them all is contained in the 24th verse, which reads thus: 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.'

These four lessons are all lessons about God's Providence; that is, about the care which God has shown beforehand for our good.

LESSON 6.

Read Genesis iii.

THIS chapter is one of the saddest in the Bible, for it tells how Adam and Eve, who were made by God, and placed by Him where they might have been happy, were tempted to disobey Him, and for their disobedience were not only banished from the garden of Eden, but also became subject to pain, sorrow, disappointment, and death. If we try to find out how their disobedience began, we shall discover that it began exactly as all our wrong deeds begin, namely, in wanting to have their own way, and in thinking that they knew better what was good for them than God, who made them and gave them so many blessings. First of all, the woman allowed herself to doubt whether what God had said was true; then she wished to take what she was forbidden to take; then she took the fruit and ate it, and gave to her husband, and he also ate; and the sin, which began in thought, was completed in act. How applicable to this story is the saying of our Saviour already quoted: 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God,' and also the Proverb, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life'! What was the consequence of this sin? Careful examination of what follows will soon show that it was estrangement or removal from God. Obedience, we learnt in our last lesson, is the true source of life and joy. Adam and Eve at first were happy because they were good. They knew that God was their loving friend, and although He was so great and powerful, they were not afraid of Him. But as soon as they had disobeyed Him they were afraid; they felt themselves strangers from Him.

After they had sinned they were not allowed, because they were not fit, to go on living as before their sin. Little by little, out of their own mouths, came a confession of what they had done, and then they were told what their punishment would be. Their life was to be no more a life of pure happiness, but was

to be mingled with sorrow. Another part of the punishment was death. The body, which had been made by God's power out of the dust to be an instrument to serve Him, having been used as an instrument to disobey Him, was to turn to dust again.

But the sentence of God upon the sinful man and woman was not altogether one of punishment. A promise was made that a Deliverer should one day be born, that the seed of the woman—one born from her, or from some woman descended from her—should bruise the serpent's head; that is, destroy the power of evil. In all that follows of the Old Testament history there is hope in the midst of sorrow, light in the deepest darkness; for the sorrow is that of men looking for a Comforter, the darkness that of a world waiting for the dawn. The New Testament tells us how the promise was fulfilled, where the words are written: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.'

The name 'Eve' has been used throughout our lesson; but we read about Adam's giving her the name only at the end of the passage of Scripture on which our lesson is given. The word is one full of meaning: it signifies 'living,' and the name was given to her, because she was to be 'the mother of all living.'

LESSON 7.

Read Genesis iv. 1—16.

THE passage just read contains an account of the first murder committed in the world. By examining the narrative we find that this crime was caused by jealousy—one of the most common, most dangerous, and most blinding of human passions.

The word 'jealous' is used in many places in the Bible as meaning only anxiously careful for someone or something. For instance, in the 1st Book of Kings we shall read of the prophet Elijah saying: 'I have been very jealous for the Lord of Hosts.' But of course that is not the sense in which we have just used the word. In using the word 'jealousy' to describe Cain's feeling towards his brother, we mean that sense of dislike, often deepening into hatred, which is apt to arise out of the rivalries of mankind. Cain could not bear to think that Abel had found more favour in God's sight than he had, and, instead of trying to please God more, he began to hate his brother. In the New Testament we shall read how jealousy blinded the people of Nazareth to our Saviour's teaching and promises; and, indeed, all history is full of examples of the endless woes brought upon mankind by the jealousy of nations and men. In truth, we cannot take this lesson too much to heart, for in this passage we see one of the worst of crimes com-

mitted under the influence of a very common passion, and of a passion which, unless we are very watchful, is apt to creep stealthily into our hearts, and to leave its poison there before we are even aware of its presence. It is, moreover, a passion that often destroys much that is noble in a man's character. Many men who have been distinguished for their early virtues have been ruined at last under its fatal influence. Jealousy often begins with just a little feeling of soreness at the success of a rival, or of annoyance because praise which we think due to us is given to someone else; but, however small the beginning may be, if we allow jealous thoughts to dwell in the mind, they will make it their home, growing daily in strength, until at last they grow into that bitter, wicked hatred which Christ tells us darkens and destroys our souls. In every age of life we need to be on our guard against this passion. It is equally likely to steal into the hearts of the young and of the old. It takes its rise alike in the rivalries of the school and in the struggles of later life, and though it comparatively seldom leads to such crimes as Cain's, it is daily leading multitudes of our fellow-men into various kinds of injustice and wrong.

The language in which the Bible speaks of the crime into which Cain's jealousy led him, shows murder to be, in the sight of God, one of the greatest crimes of which man can be guilty. Nothing can be more striking than the words of the Lord: 'The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground;' or than the passages in which Cain is represented as being driven from the presence of the Lord. Of course the words of Cain, 'From Thy face shall I be hid,' and also the words in a later part of the chapter, which tell how 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord,' must be taken in what is termed a figurative sense. What they describe is the sense in Cain of distance and estrangement from God, and of the weakness which followed his crime, and which must follow the crimes of all persons who know and yet disobey God's will. This feeling of distance and separation from God was followed in Cain's case by the timidity and fears which have in all ages affected great sinners, and which have been so common that almost all nations have proverbs to describe them. Cain felt so bitterly guilty, and unprotected in his guilty state, that he feared lest, even when he was far from the scene of his crime, men to whom the crime was unknown should find him and slay him. Let us close this lesson with one of the Proverbs of Solomon, in which this dreadful state of vague terror consequent on sin is set forth: 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth.'

LESSON 8.

Epitome, from death of Abel to the Flood.

AFTER the murder of Abel and the departure of Cain, another son was born to Adam and Eve, whom they named Seth.

From the birth of Seth, for a number of years, or hundreds of years, which cannot be reckoned exactly, we know very little indeed of the history of mankind. What we do know is that men were divided into two families, the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth: we may call them Cainites and Sethites. The Cainites were an agricultural people; that is, they lived by cultivating the ground. The Sethites were a pastoral people; that is, they fed and watched sheep and cattle. The great difference in their occupations made also a great difference in all their habits and ways of life. Those who were engaged in agriculture were obliged to find out how to make tools to do their work with, for ploughs and spades were not made without much thought and trouble. There is a proverb which says: 'Necessity is the mother of invention.' Men could not raise enough corn and other vegetables for food simply by scratching the ground with sticks, and so they were forced to look for something else. They found out, or invented—for the word 'invent' means 'to find out'—a way to use iron and other metals. Then they invented other arts, for comfort and luxury, as well as for use.

Nothing of this kind is told us about the descendants of Seth, the shepherd people. From this silence of Scripture some persons have supposed that they were contented with their quiet lives, and did not care for arts and luxury.

So far it seems as if the Cainites were better off than the Sethites, for they had much more of what we sometimes call civilisation. But the descendants of Seth had been taught to worship God, while the sons of Cain had learnt nothing of the kind. The poorer men, the less clever, were, after all, better men than the clever and wealthy ones. All their inventions, their use of metal, &c., and their arts of music and poetry, did not prevent their being bad men.

As time went on, the families, which had at first been widely separated, came together. When people meet in this way they always learn something from each other. These families might both have learnt good: the Sethites might have learnt the arts of the Cainites, and taught them the knowledge of God. But, unhappily, it turned out quite the other way. If even the quiet shepherds learnt to use metal, &c., they did not teach the other people to know and love God, but forgot Him themselves. So the world grew worse and worse; violence and wickedness of all kinds were practised every-

where, till only one man was left who still remembered and worshipped God. Then the punishment of all this evil came. One man, Noah, was to be preserved to keep men alive, and all who were not of his household were to be destroyed by a flood.

Before matters came to this state there was one man whose life might have been an example to his fellow-men. Of Enoch we read that he 'walked with God.' And his piety received a remarkable reward. He did not live on earth so long as some others of that early time; but he was removed to a better life, without tasting the bitterness of death. 'Enoch walked with God; and he was not: for God took him' (*See Hebrews xi. 5*).

LESSON 9.

Read Genesis vi. 13—vii. 24.

THESE two chapters contain an account of the Flood, and, for a history of so wonderful an event, are very brief indeed. Their brevity might disappoint us, did we not bear in mind the great purpose of the Bible—that is, not to teach us all about everything that happened, but to teach us how to live according to God's will. An ordinary historian would almost certainly have tried to describe the outbreak of the tempest, the terror of the people, and their efforts to save their lives as the waters rose higher and higher, and the life of the beings saved in the ark. A book of science would have contained accounts of the forces employed to bring about the Flood, statements of the depth of the water in various places, and so on. And all this would be interesting and instructive; still it would have taken much space, and could hardly guide us much in our every-day life. But the Bible in this respect remains true to its purpose. The opening part of the 6th chapter of Genesis shows how entirely wickedness and violence are opposed to the will of God. In the 3rd verse we read: 'And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man;' and in the 5th and 6th verses it is written: 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.' The word 'repent' is not used here in the sense in which we often use it, to express regret for something which we have done. God, being Almighty and All-wise, cannot, of course, do anything which would make Him sorry that He had done it. As the Prophet Samuel says: 'The strength of Israel' (that is, God) 'will not lie or repent, for He is not a man that He should repent.' The expressions 'God repented' and 'it grieved Him' are, then, intended to describe God's sorrow at the wickedness into

which man, created in God's own likeness, had fallen. The word 'repent' is frequently used in the Bible in this particular sense. If we are to learn anything at all of God's will and purposes, they must be expressed in words the meaning of which we know, and unless words express human thoughts they will be unmeaning to us.

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Now let us consider why Noah and his family were preserved alive, when so many perished in the Flood. There are two verses in the Bible which show that he is intended to be an example of faith in God and obedience to His will, and of the reward which God bestows on those who serve Him faithfully. In Genesis vi. 9 we read: 'Noah walked with God'—words used also in the previous chapter of the good Enoch, and meaning that he was so obedient to God that it seemed as if God was his constant companion and guide. Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 7) we read: 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.' The preparing of the ark must have taken a very long time, and meanwhile there was no outward sign of a flood. The world went on just as it had done for hundreds of years; the people around Noah and his family cared nothing for Noah's warning; and nothing that they had seen or heard of in the past made it seem likely to them that the Flood would ever come. Our Lord's words in the Gospels exactly describe their condition: 'In the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.' But, however unlikely it might seem, Noah believed that God's words would be fulfilled. This is just the point where Noah affords such a valuable example to us. Even if wickedness seems to have the mastery all around us—even if we are never so lonely in doing right—even if we are considered foolish for trusting in God—let us remember Noah and his deliverance from the Flood, and still trust on. God never changes. He hates sin as He has always hated it, and sooner or later He will certainly punish it. His delay sometimes seems long, and the manner of the punishment He will send will not be the same as in the days of Noah, yet the punishment will surely come at last. Sometimes we may never know the punishment of some great wickedness; perhaps we may even die in doing and for doing right, and may see wickedness triumphant all around. Then we must take up the heroic words of Job, and try to say of God with all our hearts: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;' for we may be sure that He is too loving and too just not to make everything right at last.

LESSON 10.

Read Genesis viii. 1—ix. 17.

OUR last lesson showed what care God took of the man who trusted and obeyed Him in the very midst of the wicked. When 'the waters increased, and bare up the ark' above the tops of the lofty mountains, Noah and his family were the only people left alive. After a time, God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged, or decreased. In the seventh month (reckoning from the time when Noah entered the ark), the flood had sunk so much that the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. Some time after that, while the lower lands were still covered with water, Noah opened the window of the ark, and sent out a raven and a dove, that he might judge, by their returning to him or not, whether the ground was sufficiently clear of water for him and his family to leave the ark. The dove seems to have been the more useful in deciding this point. The raven did not return to the ark at all, but the dove came back, because she could find no rest elsewhere. When sent out the second time, after some days of waiting, she returned with an olive-leaf, showing that the waters were abated from off the earth. Another week passed, and then the dove, sent forth once more, did not return. About a year after Noah's entering into the ark, he removed the covering of the ark, and found that the earth was dry. God then directed that Noah and his family should come out of the ark, bringing with them the other creatures which had been preserved there. Noah showed his gratitude to God for his wonderful deliverance by building an altar, and offering sacrifices upon it. Then there came three very important events:

First, God promised that no such flood should ever happen again. The words of this promise are so beautiful that it would be well to commit them to memory: 'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter. and day and night shall not cease.'

Second, He pronounced a blessing upon Noah and his sons, and gave them some simple laws to obey. They were told that the world and all its creatures were at their disposal, but not human life. Any injury to this was declared to be special irreverence to God, for He has made man in His own image. How solemnly did this remind Noah and his sons of the violence and wickedness that provoked the Flood! These words have been handed down as a law for all people ever since; and how frightfully they have sometimes been disobeyed! Those who are brutal and savage, and cruel to others, insult God who made all, whether strong or weak, old or young, rich or poor; and they store up for

themselves punishment, which may be slow in coming, but which is not the less certain to come.

Third, God chose the rainbow to be the sign, or pledge, of His covenant with man. Whenever we see one of these beautiful arches in the sky, it should make us thankful for the long, long years through which God has kept His promises to Noah. And if we really are thankful for God's love and faithfulness to us we shall not be likely to live in this world of His, and take any part in making it a place of violence and wickedness again.

LESSON 11.

From the Flood to Abram's Journey into Egypt.— Epitome.

AFTER the Flood there comes another long period, for the history of which the Bible gives us only a few hints. During that time men spread abroad over the face of the earth, fulfilling the Divine command, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.' Then also some of the great empires of the ancient world, such as those of Egypt and Assyria, must have been founded, but all we are told is that Nimrod 'began to be a mighty one in the earth;' and that 'the beginning of his kingdom was Babel (Babylon) in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur and builded Nineveh,' doubtless the city which was the capital of that empire of Assyria, which preserves Asshur's name. Further than this we may guess that Javan, son of Japhet, was the ancestor of the Ionians, or Greeks, and that Mizraim, son of Ham, founded Egypt. Beyond this there is room for a great deal of conjecture. But what the Bible teaches us certainly is that all nations now living in the world are really of one blood, so that, although we are so different, say, from Kafirs or Eskimos, we ought not to look down upon them as if they were less human than ourselves. One sad piece of history must here be noticed. Some of Noah's descendants wilfully disobeyed God's commandment. They did not forget that they had been bidden to spread abroad over the earth, but of their own will they tried to prevent dispersion. They resolved to build a city and a tower, for a sign to themselves of the unity of mankind; but God caused them, in spite of themselves, to fulfil His word; for He made their languages differ so much that they were unable to understand each other, and so their plan of keeping all together in one place came to nothing. The name given to the city from this fact was Babel, a word which means confusion. This, probably, was the city which was in later times the seat of the great empire of Babylon.

After giving us these brief glimpses of the history of mankind at

large, the Bible goes on to give us very particular accounts of one family and one member of that family. The family is the family of Terah; the man is Abram (afterwards called Abraham), from whom descended the nation of the Israelites, whose history, prophecies, and poetry fill the rest of the Bible, and have had immense influence over nearly all the civilised nations of the world.

The brief account of the journeying of the family of Terah is very interesting, because it is nearly, if not quite, the first record of those migrations, or removals of whole families or nations, so frequently mentioned in general history. Our own ancestors, and those of all the present inhabitants of Europe, have migrated hither from the East. It is interesting, therefore, to find the family from which the Israelites descended moving in the same direction. But it is not merely because the account is interesting that we refer to it now. If we ask why so many nations moved westward, we can find no certain answer. But why did Abram move westward? In obedience to a Divine command. At the beginning of his history we find him showing the same faith in and obedience to God, which it will be our business to trace all his life through. Why the whole family of Terah left their original home in Ur of the Chaldees we cannot be sure. They went all together from Ur¹ (supposed to be a city whose ruins are found near the Euphrates, about 100 miles from the Persian Gulf), to Haran,¹ in Mesopotamia, the higher country between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. There Terah died, and Nahor, one of his sons, settled. And here the history of Abram, Terah's other son, begins. We read, in the 12th chapter of Genesis: 'Now the Lord had said (or, the Lord said) unto Abram, get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Abram was then seventy-five years old, and had no son; so his leaving his kindred must have been all the more painful to him. But he departed at once, 'not knowing whither he went,' only that it was to a land which God would show him. His only companions on his journey were his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot. At length Abram came into the land of Canaan, still, apparently, without knowing where or how his wanderings would end; but when he had reached the central part of that country, the Lord appeared to him, and told him that that was the land which his descendants should possess. Abram

¹ For discussion of the geographical details, see the articles 'Ur' and 'Haran' in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*.

showed his faith and his gratitude by building an altar and worshipping the God who had guided him so far.

Before long, Abram had to leave the land he had travelled so far to find; a famine drove him into Egypt, which was then, we may suppose, as it is now, one of the greatest corn-growing countries in the world.

This part of Abram's life, when he was constantly journeying on, moving his tent almost from day to day, not knowing whither he was going, is used in the New Testament as a picture of our human life, the only sure guidance in which is the guidance which Abram followed—faith in God.

LESSON 12.

Read Genesis xiii.

IN outward appearance, in his manner of travelling, and in his mode of life, Abram was very much like a modern Arab sheikh. But his trust in God, and his assurance that God's promise to him would sooner or later be fulfilled, while they prevented his becoming fretful or uneasy, enabled him to show a courtesy towards others, and a self-restraint, which would become a Christian gentleman. When the famine spoken of in our last lesson was over, Abram and Lot and their households left Egypt, and came again to Canaan, to the place where Abram had built an altar, and there, we are told again, Abram 'called upon the name of the Lord.' Meantime both the uncle and the nephew had greatly prospered. Their flocks and herds had so increased that jealousies as to right of pasturage or water in certain places were constantly occurring between their servants. Abram, if he had chosen, might have told his nephew to go away and feed his flocks elsewhere, the elder having still, and always having had, authority in such matters over the younger. But, instead of that, he requested Lot to choose a feeding ground for himself, and promised that he would keep his own flocks and herds elsewhere. Lot chose the fertile and well-watered country in the plain of the Jordan (you may look at the map and point out the district: it is just where the Jordan falls into the Dead Sea). Abram removed to the hill-country of the south, and dwelt in Hebron.

This may seem a little thing to talk about, but it is really one of more importance than many which at first seem greater. Even now, when we have all the advantages and restraints of civilised life, when we cannot, if we would, have and do everything just as we please, it is by no means a little thing for any person to learn to deny himself, to give up something of his own free-will, for the sake of somebody else. Solomon says, in one of his Proverbs:

'He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.' That is as true now as it was nearly 3,000 years ago. How came Abram, with no laws by which he could be compelled to yield anything to his nephew, to reach so high a degree of unselfishness? What authority there was in those times, the authority of general custom and practice would have tended the other way—would have made Lot yield to Abram, not Abram to him.

In this matter, as in others which we shall have to consider, it was Abram's religion which raised him so much above the thoughts and ways of the persons around him. God called him, and he obeyed; he acknowledged in all his actions, and not only in words, that there was one God to whom his obedience was due, to whom alone worship ought to be offered. In Abram's trust in God, in his love towards God, and his consequent lofty unselfishness towards the men with whom he had to do, we may see the reverse of that dreadful fate which came upon Adam and Eve and upon Cain. Sin, we learnt there, was an estrangement from God; obedience, we learn here, is the commencement of a return to God. Abram, who obeyed his Maker, and worshipped Him alone, knew that this unselfishness and purity of desire and action formed part of the image of that God who made him and had promised to bless him. Whatever present result might follow, whether he should gain or lose in property by thus offering a choice of the best to his nephew, he knew that the end would be well, for he had God's promise, which could not fail. Our conduct under similar circumstances ought to be guided by the same motives. We should not be always considering what is most advantageous for ourselves, but rather what is most advantageous for other men. And this consideration ought not to be mixed up with another, namely, that our own advantage may be best served by unselfishness. Even if our self-denial brings us no benefit that we can estimate in money or in money's worth, it will have been an advantage to our soul's health and welfare, for we shall be nearer to God by obeying His commandment: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

LESSON 13.

Read Genesis xiv. 13—24.

BUT Lot's chosen place of abode was not quite all that he had hoped it would be. The people who lived in the cities were very wicked. Their country was very fertile, and its fertility made other people desire to have it. A king from the East came and subdued the land, which was subject to him for twelve years. Then the people of the plain rebelled, but, only one year after, they were subdued again. Lot, probably, had nothing to do with the rebellion

but he was in Sodom when it was put down, and had to share the fate of those who received their just punishment. He was made prisoner, and his goods were taken as a prey.

In the passage read to-day we find Abram showing in war the same generosity as he had shown in peace when he gave to his nephew the choice of a place of abode. He was not in the least vexed with Lot for choosing the most fertile country for his home; but as soon as Lot was in distress, he collected his own servants, (from their number we find that Abram might almost be called a king) and obtained help from the chiefs who lived near Hebron. Altogether these chiefs raised a band which was able to prevail over the soldiers of the kings of the East. When the victory was gained, and when the spoil, or goods which had been taken away, had been recovered, Abram would receive nothing as payment for his help. He might have claimed the largest share of all the property he brought back; but he gave up that claim entirely, not wishing to be made rich by the calamities of other men. But as Abram had no right to say that the other chiefs, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, should not be paid—for they were neither his servants nor friends of Lot—we find him requesting that they should be fairly paid for their trouble and kindness. This conduct proves that Abram was not only generous, but just.

The meeting with Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God, is an event which has been explained in many different ways. The story is hard to explain, especially if we have also to consider the allusions made to it in some parts of the New Testament. But there is one very simple lesson to be drawn from it. The nation of the Jews, descended from Abraham, preserved the worship of the one true God when other nations forgot it, and by degrees they came to believe that they were the only people who had known the true God. But this event in the life of Abraham might have taught them, and should teach us, otherwise. Abraham was not the only true worshipper of God; indeed, by his receiving a blessing from Melchizedek, he acknowledged that Melchizedek knew more of God than he did. Thus early do we find the Bible teaching us what St. Paul taught the men of Athens hundreds of years afterwards—that God made of one blood all nations of men, 'that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.'

LESSON 14.

Epitome of Chapters xv.—xvii.

AFTER these things Abram received another confirmation of the promises that had already been made to him. He was still childless, and supposed that, as was the custom in early times, his chief servant or steward, Eliezer of Damascus, would be the heir, both of the property he had acquired, and of the promises made to him. But he was told that his heir should be a son of his own, and that his offspring through that son should be as numerous as the stars of heaven. At the same time he was shown that his descendants were not to enter into immediate possession of Canaan, but that they should first suffer oppression and captivity in a foreign land. In all these things Abram trusted God entirely, and because of his faith he has received the name of Father of the Faithful. When the promise of a son of his own had been thus made to Abram, he talked about it to his wife Sarai, and she advised him to take, as a second wife, her servant Hagar, an Egyptian slave, thinking that if Hagar had any children, they would be counted as belonging to her (Sarai). Abram did so: but very soon Hagar and Sarai grew jealous of each other, and at last Sarai treated Hagar so cruelly that she ran away. But she returned again to Abram's tent, and after a little time she had a son, whose name, Ishmael, meaning 'God hears,' represents either Hagar's thanksgiving for the end of the ill-treatment she received from Sarai, or Abram's thankfulness that at last he had a son. Fifteen years passed away, and then Abram's faith was once more tried. He was told that the heir of the promises should be one born of his wife Sarai, whose name was then changed to Sarah; Abram's own name also being changed to that which we know better, Abraham. The fatherly love of Abraham is shown in his desire, even at the moment when he was assured that Sarah should have a son, for some special blessing upon Ishmael. The promise was given that he also should be the head of a great nation—a promise which the present existence of many Arab tribes shows to have been fulfilled. Accompanying these promises a command was given to Abraham, obedience to which was to be the sign of a covenant between God and Abraham. This sign, or ordinance, of circumcision has been from that time to this one of the marks which have distinguished the Jews. It is not peculiar to them, for the Arabs, who are descended from Ishmael, observe the same custom.

Abraham was at this time ninety-nine years old, and Sarah about ten years younger. Our next lesson will show how she received the promise.

LESSON 15.

Read Genesis viii. 1—22.

THE whole course of this narrative shows that the three men whom Abraham received with hospitality were more than men. So, at all events, one of the writers of the New Testament appears to have believed, for it is almost certain that it is to this event that the well-known words of the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews refer: 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'

It is impossible to discuss fully in elementary lessons like these the exact nature of the beings employed as God's messengers to men. The word 'angel' itself is a Greek word, and means 'messenger.' But though it would be long and difficult to explain what learned and pious men have believed and taught about angels, it is not difficult to believe and understand that God does, in some way or other, still make known His will to men; that He has, if we may so say, messages to send to us. If so, He who has all power can surely use what messengers He pleases. Instead of thinking that we are worse off than the men who lived long ago, because they may have *seen* the messengers who were sent to them, it would be wiser for us to cherish and to love every person, every thing, every thought, which makes us truer and better, because those persons, things, or thoughts may really be God's messengers to us.

Abraham, immediately on seeing the three strangers, hastened to provide for them the best entertainment he could. Let us try to picture the scene to ourselves. It is one of the most simple and most beautiful we can fancy. A shady place under a spreading tree, whose shade is doubly pleasant because the time is the heat of the day; three travellers resting there; and a noble old man, the master of the encampment, himself busy in waiting upon his guests.

For what purpose had these visitors come? First, to announce to Abraham the exact time when his son, so long promised, was to be born. Sarah, who was in the tent, heard the promise, and laughed, as if it were altogether absurd that she should have a son. When charged with this, she denied that she had laughed at all, and was rebuked by the messengers for her deceit.

The second message brought to Abraham was a terrible one. The men of the cities of the plain, where Lot lived, were so abominably wicked that they were not fit to live, and Abraham was allowed to know that the cities with all their inhabitants were about to be destroyed. Abraham's nephew was there: that would

be one reason why Abraham would grieve at the knowledge that such a destruction was close at hand; but, besides that, it is very terrible to a good man to think of the utter destruction of any of his fellow-men, even if he knows that they deserve it. Might there not be still some good men among those evil ones? thought Abraham. If so, would it be right that all should perish? These are questions which often come into our minds when we have to think about such things. There are dreadful things in the world, and we cannot prevent their existence by shutting our eyes and refusing to see them. Abraham felt the same great difficulty, and therefore asked God to help him to understand. His prayer was in one way answered; he came to the conclusion, which it will be well if we can reach, that 'the Judge of all the earth' would 'do right.'

The punishment came. The cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, were destroyed by fire from heaven—an awful warning to all whose sins are both against the moral laws of God and against the nature which He has given us. Right was done, although the suffering inflicted in carrying it out was tremendous. Only Lot and his two daughters were saved: Lot's wife was rescued from the city, but of her own will she disobeyed the command of the messengers of God, 'Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain.' Her selfwill was punished: 'she became a pillar of salt.'

LESSON 16.

Notes on Hospitality (for Elder Scholars only).

THE conduct of Abraham towards the mysterious strangers who came to his tent gives us an opportunity of saying a few words on an important subject. Abraham here appears as an example of showing hospitality. But what is hospitality? An English dictionary will say 'Hospitality, s., quality of being hospitable; kindness to strangers.' But that explanation tells us nothing about the reasons why good men are kind to strangers. Let us now briefly consider those reasons.

There is in man, even in his most savage state, and also in the beasts which perish, a noble and most beautiful instinct, which prompts them to be kind to their children or their young ones. The most ignorant barbarians show kindness to their very near kindred, and also to those with whom they live daily, and with whom they are always having to do, although in this last case there may be nothing of what we call relationship.

The fiercest wild beasts are very tender and affectionate towards their young ones, and make great sacrifices for them. Ants, bees, beavers, and many other animals live in societies, and with the-

greatest order and industry work for the common good of themselves and their immediate associates. Ants work together to store up food; bees work together to build combs and fill them with honey; beavers work together to make dams across the streams in which they build their huts. But savages seldom, and brute animals never, show hospitality or acts of kindness to absolute strangers, or persons not related to them by blood or close acquaintance. The lowest savages would almost as soon put to death an absolute stranger who wandered into one of their villages, as a lion or a bear would kill a weaker animal that came into his den.

Hospitality, then, is a virtue known only in man, and not even in man when he is in his lowest state of barbarism. When he begins to be hospitable he ceases to be one of the lowest savages, for it is only when man has learnt the great truth that all men were created by one God, who is the Father of us all, and that we are bound together into one brotherhood by our common humanity,—it is only then that man begins to show kindness in any form to absolute strangers.

The instances of hospitality recorded in the Old Testament are, therefore, extremely interesting, because they are the earliest historical notices we have of any virtue which rests upon the great truth of human brotherhood. This truth is taught in many passages of the Bible, but it is interesting to see that it was understood and acted upon to some extent before it had been taught in words. The most familiar of such passages are in the New Testament, but the last of the books of the Old Testament contains one. Malachi says: 'Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?' But St. Paul speaks much more plainly in his address to the men of Athens. He says: 'God giveth to all life, and breath, and all things, and hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth.'¹

As civilisation advances the exercise of hospitality in its earlier forms becomes more and more difficult, and finally almost impossible. Men become too numerous for its exercise. Hospitality like Abraham's can be practised only in a thinly-peopled country—the kind of country, too, where it is most useful. In crowded cities and towns, where there are public inns and multitudes of strangers constantly passing to and fro, it would be quite impossible to open our houses to every stranger we meet.

But the same spirit of hospitality leads to many of the unselfish deeds of good men in the present day. Such persons believe the great truth that we owe duties to our fellow-men,

¹ He then quotes the words of a Greek poet (Aratus or Cleanthes) on the same truth: 'As certain of

your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."'

simply because they, like ourselves, are made in the image of God. This spirit stirs them to do good, not merely to those of their own household or kindred, but to men whose only claim upon them is, their manhood. This is the spirit displayed by those who sacrifice their lives for their country, or perform acts of dangerous charity. We have all read or heard of such cases. How often have Christian ministers and others died from illnesses caught in visiting and carrying consolation to comparative strangers, who have been stricken with infectious disease! How willingly a medical man goes to see a patient, even in a place which is full of fever! How eagerly the lifeboat men get into their boat and put off to the rescue of sailors in danger of drowning! All such acts are prompted by the same spirit which led Abraham to entertain the angels who came to him in the form of men, of whom he knew nothing, and whose claim on his kindness, so far as he knew, rested only on the basis of their common humanity.

There are two texts which may be quoted to impress the moral of this lesson. The first is a command given to the Israelites by Moses: 'The Lord your God loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger.' The second is a portion of one of our Saviour's last parables, where, in commending the hospitable, He says: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

LESSON 17.

Read Genesis xxi. 1—21.

IN the early part of the passage of the Bible which we have just read we find a brief statement of the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. The son of the promise was given, and was named Isaac, or laughter. The feeling of the elder son Ishmael, whose mother was the bondwoman Hagar, towards this younger son, was by no means a feeling of love. Sarah saw him mocking, and required of Abraham that he should be sent away at once. Abraham was sorely grieved, for, although Isaac and not Ishmael was to be the heir of the promise, Abraham could not withdraw the love which he had for fourteen years poured out upon his firstborn. But when he found that God's command was to the same effect as Sarah's request, he hesitated no longer; he rose early in the morning and sent away both Ishmael and his mother. This repression of his own affection, and giving up of his own wish in immediate obedience to God's command, is an instance of that same faith in God of which a more conspicuous example will be found in our next lesson.

The story which follows is most touching. We see how in the

wilderness, where Hagar and Ishmael were wandering, they were nearly dying of thirst. The poor mother could not relieve her child's suffering, and could not bear to see his anguish, which she knew would soon end in death. She put him under the shade of one of the shrubs and sat down at some distance from him and wept. But God—who had promised Abraham that Ishmael also, as well as Isaac, should live, and become a nation, because he too was Abraham's son—was watching over the wanderers, and by opening the eyes of Hagar to see a well of water, enabled her to save her child's life and her own as well.

We cannot properly understand the whole force and pathos of this passage, unless we bear in mind that thirst as it is experienced in a burning Eastern desert is a very very different thing from that mild wish for water with which alone most of us are familiar. If we are only a few hours without water we feel decided discomfort, but we are sure, in England at any rate, that that discomfort will speedily be relieved. But, in an Eastern desert, such as that of Beersheba, where Hagar and Ishmael were wandering, there are no supplies of water except in the wells, which are often at a distance of several days' journey from each other. The routes of caravans over these deserts are sometimes made very circuitous, by the necessity of halting and obtaining fresh supplies of water at every well. The travellers carry with them large leather bottles to contain a store of water, but even with their best precautions the water often fails before the next well is reached, and then they have to struggle on in the intensest torture, and often perish miserably. The hot sun, the parched sand, and the very dry atmosphere, all make water more necessary and thirst more frequent and pressing. The pain caused by thirst of this character has been described by many travellers in the East, and is sometimes increased by a natural phenomenon called the mirage, which is not uncommon in sandy deserts. The light of the sun shining on the air in certain conditions gives back a blue reflection which looks like clear water, and it is only when the thirsty traveller reaches the place, and finds arid sand where an hour or two before he had believed himself to see a lake of cool water, that he experiences the utmost anguish, for then disappointment is added to the pain of thirst. Thirst, as it is often felt in hot climates, is described as being not merely a dryness of the mouth and throat, but as affecting the whole body; the skin and the eyes and nostrils thirst as much as the lips and throat. Sight becomes imperfect, hearing very difficult, speech impossible. The effect upon the mind is often also very sad; before consciousness is quite lost, the thirsty wanderer becomes raving mad.

Now the writers of the various books of the Bible were Asiatics,

and knew from their own experience what thirst in the burning desert really is. They therefore used it frequently to describe the most intense longing that they could conceive. We have this knowledge of the real nature of thirst in the East only at second-hand; but even the little that we have gathered in this lesson will enable us to understand better than before those passages in both the Old and New Testaments in which 'thirst' is used as an image of moral and spiritual desire. Let us take two passages and read them with the light thrown on them by what we have learnt of bodily thirst. In the 63rd Psalm, David says: 'O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul *thirsteth* for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and *thirsty* land, where no water is.' Reading this as the first verse we can appreciate better the earnestness of the Psalmist's desire for God's blessing when he goes on to say: 'Thy loving kindness is better than life.' Again in the New Testament (St. Matthew, v. 6) our Saviour says: 'Blessed are they that do hunger and *thirst* after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' It is not merely a mild wish to do God's will, if obedience prove to be tolerably easy, but an overmastering desire of the whole nature, like that of a thirsty traveller in the desert, to which the blessing is promised.

LESSON 18.

Read Genesis xxii. 1—19.

IN the very first verse of this chapter there is one word which, if misunderstood, will prevent our learning the lesson which the rest of the chapter teaches. That is the word 'tempt':—'God did tempt Abraham.' We generally use that word to mean inducing somebody else to do wrong, as when a boy tempts another to play truant, or when men tempt each other to steal or get drunk. If we read the verse with that meaning in our minds we should be likely to ask: 'How could God, who is perfectly good, try to make Abraham or any man do that which is evil?' and we should be likely also to think that Abraham's obedience was a wrong thing. We must remember that the Old Testament was not written in English, but in Hebrew, and translated into English in modern times. When, therefore, such difficulties arise, the wisest thing to do is to ask those who have studied Hebrew what the words in Hebrew mean. If we do so in this case we find that the word does not mean inducing a man to do wrong, but simply trying or testing him to see what he will do. This was a trial of Abraham's faith and obedience; by no means an attempt to make him fall from goodness. We may sometimes make attempts of that kind.

upon each other, and be glad when show that men were even then error; but God never treats us so. Another. There are in this and helps us to do right, and very often, a sale, and of the payment us, to enable us to show how much we have, which was current how great our desire is to obey Him. Just in weight; and the questions put to a child upon his lessons are not put to in the 17th mistakes, but to give him an opportunity of showing how would be lessons have been learnt. One of the best Hebrew Lexicons 'examine' as the meaning of this very word, which is used also in 1 Sam. xvii. 39, 'proved,' and in Psalm xxvi. 2, 'prove me.' The modern sense of the word 'tempt,' it may also be well to remember, is quite modern; it was at first only the English spelling of the Latin 'tentare,' to try, and in that sense was used at the time when our present translation was made.

We may next ask why so severe a trial was applied to Abraham's faith? Why was Abraham required to give up, to offer to God, that son whom God had given him with the promise that he should be the father of a great nation? Possibly there were more reasons than one, but certainly the great reason was that Abraham himself might receive good, that his faith might be strengthened by exercise.

The use of the words 'strengthened by exercise' suggests a few illustrations. Most frequently, when we speak of exercise, we mean using the whole or some part of our bodies. Running, jumping, walking, are very different kinds of exercise; why do we run, jump, and walk? (i.e., when it is open to us, if we choose, to remain still)—why do boys and girls run and play? The fact is, that every hearty game of play strengthens their bodies, makes their muscles firm, and makes it more probable that they will grow up to be strong and healthy men and women. And then, when childhood and play-time are past, and work begins, the same kind of thing continues. A smith or a carpenter generally has much stronger arms than a shopkeeper or a clerk; the reason is plain, because he uses them more. Something of the same sort is true also of our minds; a boy who tries to learn his lessons well is generally able to understand other things also, better than one who gives himself no trouble.

From the case of Abraham we may learn that our souls, and the strength of our souls, are tried and improved in a similar way. It seemed a dreadful thing to Abraham that he should be commanded to slay his only son, but when once he knew that the command came from God he resolved to obey it. He trusted in God, and was sure that the end would be good, although he could not understand it. That trust or faith strengthened him and made him a

better man. At the end, when all was ready, the sacrifice was prevented, for the end of the discipline was reached: Abraham had already sacrificed himself.

This sore trouble which was sent to try and to strengthen Abraham is a type—that is, an example, or a picture—of many of the trials which are now sent upon us. Plans which we have formed, and which we think sure to succeed, fail after all our best endeavours; troubles come upon us which we had not expected, and of which we cannot discover the reasons; we are obliged to give up so much that we seem almost to be sacrificing our lives. Then we must take care lest we be ready to fancy that troubles come by chance. Job tells us: ‘Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.’ Trials are sent by God to strengthen us, and to build up our spiritual selves, to lead us to hope and trust in Him, and to wait for an explanation of our mysterious troubles until we see Him face to face. That such may be the end to us we must obey as Abraham did, and learn to say with the greatest of Abraham’s seed, our Saviour Christ, ‘Thy will be done.’

LESSON 19.

Read Genesis xxiii.

THIS chapter shows us how Abraham obtained his first and only possession in the land which God had promised to give to his descendants. That possession was a grave. The faith of Abraham in God’s promise was so strong, that although while he lived he was a stranger in the land, yet he desired to have a place of burial made sure to him, so that when his descendants at last entered upon their possession, they might know where the body of their great ancestor was lying. His constant mention of *possession* of the field and the cave seems to show that it was a preparation for his own burial when his time should come, as well as for that of Sarah, who was already dead. All people, except the lowest savages, have had a desire to keep the places where their dead are buried sacred and undisturbed. To allow any noise or tumult in churchyards always seems like showing disrespect for the memory of the dead. And very few things have such power over grown-up people as the remembrance of those whom they knew and loved when they were young. We cannot wonder, then, at Abraham’s anxiety to have for his own the place where his wife was to be buried and where he himself might lie. If he had accepted the kindly and generous offer of the children of Heth, he would have seemed to account himself as one of them; but he was, to the day of his death, a stranger; he was among them, but not of them.

Several things in this chapter show that men were even then ruled by law in their dealings one with another. There are in this case public witnesses of the bargain, of the sale, and of the payment of the money; there is the payment of silver, which was current money with the merchant—good silver and full weight; and the description of the land conveyed to Abraham, as given in the 17th verse, is almost as formal and precise as such a description would be in a modern conveyance of land.

Honest dealing on both sides, calm and thoughtful offers to pay, and fair statements of the value of the field, are what we chiefly notice in the whole story.

The cave of Machpelah is still regarded with the greatest reverence by the Arab possessors of Hebron. The place is considered so holy that none but Mohammedans are allowed to approach it. The only Christians in the present generation who are known to have obtained the privilege are the Prince of Wales and his fellow-travellers, including the Dean of Westminster, from whose account of the visit the following particulars are, with his permission, reprinted:—

Over the cave is a mosque (a Mohammedan place of worship) which was once a Christian church. Proofs of this fact are given by Dr. Stanley, who then goes on—‘I now proceed to describe the Tombs of the Patriarchs, premising always that these tombs, like all those in Mussulman mosques, and, indeed, like most tombs in Christian churches, do not profess to be the actual places of sepulture, but are merely monuments or cenotaphs in honour of the dead who lie beneath. Each is enclosed within a separate chapel or shrine, closed with gates or railings similar to those which surround the special chapels or tombs in Westminster Abbey. The two first of these shrines or chapels are contained in the inner portico, before the entrance into the actual building of the mosque. In the recess on the right is the shrine of Abraham. . . . The shrine of Abraham, after a momentary hesitation, was thrown open. The guardians groaned aloud. But their chief turned to us with the remark: “The Princes of any other nation should have passed over my dead body sooner than enter. But to the eldest son of the Queen of England we are willing to accord even this privilege.” He stepped in before us, and offered an ejaculatory prayer to the dead Patriarch: “O Friend of God, forgive this intrusion.” We then entered. The chamber is cased in marble. The so-called tomb consists of a coffin-like structure, about six feet high, built up of plastered stone or marble, and covered with three carpets, green embroidered with gold.’

The shrines of Sarah, and of Isaac and Rebekah, were also seen, but not entered. The party wished to enter that of Isaac, but the

guardians objected. The visitors asked why an objection which had been conceded for Abraham should be raised in the case of his far less eminent son. The answer was, 'Abraham was full of loving kindness; he had withstood even the resolution of God against Sodom and Gomorrah; he was goodness itself, and would overlook any affront. But Isaac was proverbially jealous, and it was exceedingly dangerous to exasperate him.'

'I mention this story,' says Dr. Stanley, 'both for the sake of this singular sentiment which it expresses, and also because it well illustrates the peculiar feeling which has tended to preserve the sanctity of the place—an awe, amounting to terror, of the great personages who lay beneath, and who would, it was supposed, be sensitive to any disrespect shown to their graves, and revenge it accordingly.'

After this the visitors saw the tombs of Jacob and Leah, and, strangely, that of Joseph, whose body, an old tradition says, was brought to Hebron after having first been deposited at Shechem.

So far, the tombs, or rather monuments, were all that they had seen. 'The mosque is built on a raised platform, under which is the cave. One indication alone of the cavern beneath was visible. In the interior of the mosque, at the corner of the shrine of Abraham, was a small circular hole, about eight inches across, of which one foot above the pavement was built with strong masonry, but of which the lower part, as far as we could see and feel, was of the living rock. This cavity appeared to open into a dark space beneath, and that space can hardly be anything else than the ancient cavern of Machpelah. . . . This aperture alone was left, partly for the sake of suffering the holy air of the cave to escape into the mosque, and be scented by the faithful; partly for the sake of allowing a lamp to be let down by a chain which we saw suspended at the mouth, to burn upon the sacred grave. We asked whether it could not be lighted now? "No," they said, "the saint likes to have a lamp at night, but not in the full daylight." With that glimpse into the dark void, we and the world without must for the present be satisfied.'

LESSON 20.

Read Genesis xxiv.

It was remarked in the last lesson that Abraham, although he dwelt among the children of Heth, was very careful not to reckon himself as one of them. His family, he had learnt, was to be kept separate from any of those which then dwelt in the land of Canaan. If he was anxious to maintain this distinction in a mere matter of business, such as the buying of the field and cave of Machpelah, he would naturally be still more anxious in such a matter as the marriage of

his son Isaac. This anxiety was the reason for his sending to Padan-Aram to obtain a wife for his son from his own kindred.

Manners and customs change so very slowly in Eastern countries, that we could reproduce from the writings of modern travellers nearly all the incidents related in this chapter. A few of them are sufficiently interesting to call for some remarks.

First, the well was the place where the servant stopped, and made his camels kneel. Why did he stop there? Because he knew that if he waited a little time he would meet as many people there as if he went into the city and rode all about. For in the East they have no water supply like ours; they cannot go into the yard and turn a tap and draw as much water as they want. Nor have they pumps. There is a well, or sometimes more than one well, just outside the city, from which water has to be fetched for the use of all the people in the city. And as people cannot live without water, the well was the very place where the servant would best be able to make the inquiries he wanted to make, about the house and family of his master's kinsmen.

Next, we notice that the water-carriers were women. According to our Western notions, the hardest work should be done by men; but in the East, and in the South of Europe, to this day, the women go to the spring or the well every evening, and carry home their household supplies of water in tall jars which they balance on their heads.

And Rebekah was fond of ornaments, though one of her ornaments was what we should consider extremely ugly. The ear-ring spoken of was really a nose-ring, a large ring which women used to wear, and in the East still wear, hung on to their noses, a hole being made to hang it on through the thin skin between the nostrils. We see that tastes in the matter of ornament differ very greatly.

Then we find that Abraham's relatives were hospitable and friendly people. Before Rebekah knew who the stranger was, she gave him a drink of the fresh water from the well, and kindly offered to draw water for the tired and thirsty camels. For remarks on hospitality as shown by Laban, the representative of his family, we may refer to the lesson on hospitality a few pages back: but it may be noticed, as agreeing remarkably with what we shall hear about Laban afterwards, that the sight of the presents which his sister had received made him more anxious to show hospitality to the servant.

But what is, to our way of thinking, the strangest part of the whole transaction, is that the marriage was arranged entirely without reference to what either Isaac or Rebekah might wish. The steward represented Abraham, and Laban represented Bethuel, and these two alone completed the contract. The only appearance

of consulting Rebekah's feelings was when they asked her whether she would start on her journey to Canaan at once, or would prefer to wait a few days. Eastern marriages are still arranged in exactly the same manner; the future husband and wife seldom see each other until the contract is complete; everything is arranged for them by their friends.

Soon after the marriage of his son Isaac, Abraham died, at the age of 175 years, and was buried in the cave of Machpelah, as we read in Genesis, chapter xxv. 8-10. 'Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.'

The two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, seem to have been on terms good enough to enable them to join thus in showing love and respect for their father; but from this time the families separated almost entirely. We find one instance afterwards of the acknowledgment of relationship, namely, when Esau, the son of Isaac, married his cousin Bashemath, Ishmael's daughter; but the more quiet Jacob and his descendants could scarcely agree with the 'wild man's' children, whose hand was to be 'against every man.'

LESSON 21.

Traditions concerning Abraham (for Elder Scholars only).

WHEN a good man dies, those who have lived with him and have seen his good deeds, who have known what noble and good thoughts were in him, do not like to let the good pass into forgetfulness. They treasure up everything they can remember about him, and tell their children the story, that they may tell their children the same. In this way what are called traditions come into existence.

Such traditions were handed down among different tribes of the East concerning the good man Abraham, and some still remain. A few of these will be given here, not as a part of his history, but to show what people long after his time thought and said about him:—

1. In the second book of Chronicles we find a title, now familiar, given to Abraham for the first time. He is called the Friend of God. In the New Testament St. James uses the same title. That title is the word which the greater number of Eastern peoples at this day use as the proper name of Abraham; that is to say, if an Arab wanted to speak about Abraham (and they often speak about

him, because many of them are descended from him through Ishmael) they do not say, as we should, 'Abraham said or did so-and-so'; but 'The Friend did so-and-so.' Almost always after the words 'the Friend' they add, 'Peace be upon him,' to show their love and respect. One of the most curious of all the ways in which Abraham's memory is preserved, is in the name of the city near which he lived the greater part of the time he was in Canaan. We call the place Hebron, choosing one of the many names it has had in its long history; but the Arabs and Syrians call it 'El Khalil,' that is, 'The Friend.'

2. When Joshua was an old man he called the Israelites together and made a long speech to them, exhorting them to be faithful and true, and to serve and fear God. In that speech he told them what we might, perhaps, guess from the account we have read of the call of Abraham, that Abraham came of an idolatrous family. 'Your fathers,' he tells them, 'served other gods.' An old tradition preserved in the Koran, the sacred book of the Mohammedans (Mohammed was born A.D. 570, died A.D. 632), gives a fuller account of what was believed on this point about Abraham's family. It tells us that Terah, Abraham's father, was not only an image-worshipper but an image-maker, and that Abraham made all his friends angry by breaking the images. When they told him he was a wicked man, he said that if the images had been gods they would have defended themselves. And then, the story goes on, 'When night overshadowed him he saw a star, and said, "This is my Lord"; but when it set, he said, "I like not those that set." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my Lord"; but when the moon set, he answered, "Verily, if my Lord direct me not in the right way, I shall be as one of those who err." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord. This is greater than star or moon"; but when the sun went down, he said, "O, my people, I am clear of these things. I turn my face to Him who hath made the heaven and the earth."

3. The third of the traditions, and the last which will be told here, is one which shows how deeply the memory of Abraham's *hospitality* has sunk into the minds of men. It is told by many authors, but most fully and most beautifully by a Persian poet, Sâdi: ¹ 'I have said that bounty is the characteristic of chiefs: I made a mistake, 'tis the moral quality of prophets. I have heard that

¹ For this translation, which is exactly literal, the author is indebted to his friend, Prof. Palmer, of Cambridge. The advantage of a *literal* translation will, it is hoped, com-

mend itself to teachers, who will be able, by an example, to show how the poetry of the Bible is marked by Oriental colouring.

one day no son of the road ¹ came to the guest-house of the Friend.² Now, from his noble disposition, it was his custom not to eat the morning meal unless some helpless one came in from the road.³ So he went out, and looked in every direction. He cast his glance over the sides of the valley, and he saw coming along alone in the desert an old man whose hair, through the snows of age, was as white as the leaves of a silver willow.⁴ In his warm-heartedness he said, "Welcome to thee"; and, after the manner of the bounteous, he cried, "Partake," saying, "O thou, who art as it were the pupil of mine eye, favour me by partaking of my bread and salt."⁵ "Yea," said he, and leaped up, and started forward apace, for he knew the generosity of the Prophet (upon whom be peace!). And the lookers-on in the guest-house of the Friend seated that old man of low estate in the post of honour; he spake, and they arranged the tray of meat, and his companions sat on every side. But when the company began to say, "In the name of God,"⁶ on their meal, no response came from the old man's mouth, and thus he said to him: "O, old man, late of days, I do not see thee as sincere and ardent in religion as old men should be. Is not this a condition, that whenever you eat bread you should bless the name of the Lord who giveth it?" He answered: "I hold not on to any form of creed which I have not heard from my fire-worshipping⁷ elder." Then the prophet, who was good at omens,⁸ knew that this man, this old man of lost estate, was a Gheber, and he drove him forth scornfully when he saw that his religion was strange, for a foul one is rejected of the pure. Then came there came a voice from the Most Mighty Creator, a voice of awe, saying: "How can they who blame Me be My friends?"⁹ I have given him a hundred years of bread and life, and thou art averse from him after a moment of time. Even though he be a worshipper of fire, why shouldst thou hold back thy hand from doing good?"

From these stories, which are written down by Mohammedans, and which represent the common belief of the people among whom

¹ i.e. a way-faring man, a traveller.

² Abraham (see No. 1).

³ i.e. to take part of the meal.

⁴ Bread and salt, as necessities of life, are still used in the East as symbols of hospitality. 'The covenant of bread and salt,' i.e. eating together, forms a bond between the partakers which is never broken.

⁵ A Mohammedan, whether Arab, Persian, Indian, or Turk, never commences any business, not even a meal, without asking God's blessing on it, in the short form 'Bismillah,'

'In the name of God.'

⁶ i.e. Abraham said to the old man.

⁷ The worship of fire, or of the sun, is one of the oldest forms of worship known. The worshippers of fire were called Ghebers; and though they were expelled from Persia by the Mohammedans, a good number still remain in India, where they are called Parsees.

⁸ Able to understand and interpret signs.

⁹ With evident reference to Abraham's title, 'The Friend.'

they were current, we find that the memory and example of Abraham have exerted an influence over other nations only less powerful than that which they exerted over the Jews.

From this fact, that Syrians, Arabs, and Persians join with Jews and Christians in cherishing the remembrance of Abraham's faith, hospitality, and goodness, we may surely learn a lesson which will have some practical result upon ourselves. Goodness never dies. Most of those who hear and believe the stories we have been reading are all the better for them. They try, if in never so small a degree, to become like him whom they admire. So should the memory of good men who are no longer living act upon us; we should endeavour to imitate them. The surest way to make our endeavours successful is to try in the spirit which is expressed in one of the most beautiful of prayers: 'We bless Thy holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear; beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom.'

LESSON 22.

The Youth of Esau and Jacob.

FOR twenty years after their marriage Isaac and Rebekah remained childless. At the end of that time Rebekah had twin sons, the elder of whom was called Esau, and the younger Jacob. There was a great difference between these twins in appearance, character, and manners, and from each of them sprang a separate nation, each nation differing from the other as much as their twin ancestors had done. The descendants of Jacob are known as Israelites, and their history will be fully traced in subsequent lessons. The nation sprung from Esau is known as the nation of the Edomites. They dwelt for many centuries in Mount Seir, a hilly but not unfruitful district to the south and south-east of the Dead Sea. In later years they were among the most cruel enemies of the Jews. The Greek form of their name, 'Idumæans,' is used by modern Jews as a general name for all whom they hate and who hate them.

Now we must turn our attention to a passage in the early history of these twin brothers, which is of considerable importance, both in itself, and as being the commencement of much sorrow and trouble to all the parties concerned. The passage is in the 25th chapter of Genesis, beginning at the 27th verse.

'And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the

field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom (*red*). And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear unto me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles: and he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.'

In this passage we read first of the parental partiality of Isaac and Rebekah, each of them making a special favourite of one of their children, and, as we gather from what follows, pushing this partiality to the point of injustice. Open, unrestrained partiality of this kind on the part of parents is always apt to create distrust and dislike between the children, to destroy their natural affection for each other, and to strengthen the bad parts of their character. We can scarcely doubt that in this case the partial treatment of the children was one cause of the quarrel which destroyed the peace and happiness of the family.

Next, let us examine the faults shown by Esau and Jacob respectively, in the matter of the mess of pottage.

Esau, as his later life shows, was a brave, frank man, capable also of doing very kind and generous deeds; but he was self-indulgent, apt to seek the gratification of his present passing wishes even at the cost of giving up things of great and lasting value. To satisfy his hunger he sold his birthright. The birthright or privilege of the eldest son, in such families as that of Isaac, is usually highly valued. It contains the right of succeeding to the headship of the family or tribe, and of inheriting a double share of the father's property. In Isaac's family there was this in addition; with the birthright, and the continuance of the line of descent, there went the inheritance of the blessing promised to the seed of Abraham. This appears to have been what Esau despised. The kind of weakness which Esau displayed is just of the same kind as that which makes men become spendthrifts and drunkards. They allow their passing wishes and appetites to master their reason and conscience, thus degrading themselves to the level of the beasts which have no higher nature to guide them.

Jacob's faults at this period of his life were different from Esau's, but they also were of a very bad kind. There is every reason to believe that he improved as he grew older, under the influence of the afflictions which his misdeeds brought upon him, but in early life he was selfish and deceitful. His sin on this occasion lay in his making his brother's pressing need a means of extorting from him a privilege to which he, Jacob, was not then entitled. This ungenerous, selfish

disposition led him afterwards into other wrong acts, and in the end brought sore trouble upon him. Had he pursued a righteous course, not only would all that trouble have been saved him, but he would have got by other means all that he obtained by his cruel conduct to his brother. Before the birth of the twins, God had revealed to their mother Rebekah that the younger child should in the end enter into all the advantages of the birthright, and we know that God can always fulfil His purposes in His own good time, without requiring man to aid Him by unrighteous means.

After the events we have been considering, Isaac went about from place to place, chiefly in the south-west of Palestine. Before the arrival of Abram in that country, there had been an immigration or invasion of a people named Philistines, who settled on the coast towards the south. They were shepherds, as also were the Gerarites, the old dwellers in that part of the country, and the wandering household of Isaac. Frequent disputes arose between these three parties, the Philistines, the Gerarites, and Isaac's herdsmen, as to the right to water their flocks at certain wells. The habit of the Philistines was to stop up the wells which had been made by the other parties, by throwing in earth and stones; that of the Gerarites was to wait until Isaac's herdsmen had dug a well, and then to assemble in force and drive them away, saying, 'The water is ours.' At last when Isaac, after many wanderings, came to Beersheba, a solemn treaty was entered into between him and the men of Gerar, and thenceforth he dwelt at Beersheba in peace.

LESSON 23.

Read Genesis xxvii.

IN the chapter which we have just read we see some of the evil consequences of the faults we were considering in our last lesson.

First, we see how one sin prepares the way for others, and draws us on in the path of guilt. Rebekah's partiality for Jacob tempted her to advise him to deceive his aged father, and Jacob's desire to secure the fruits of his cruel bargain with his brother led him readily to fall in with her proposal. The cruelty of the deception is made worse by the blind and helpless state of Isaac, which would have moved to compassion any son not hardened by the wrong desires which Jacob had allowed to dwell in and poison his soul. It is the strongest proof of the miserable condition to which Jacob had brought himself by harbouring these desires, that he could expect any real happiness to follow a blessing so deceitfully obtained.

Next follows the punishment. Jacob was obliged to flee from his home through fear of Esau's resentment, and Rebekah was

thus separated from the favourite son, for whose supposed good she had deceived her husband, and estranged and embittered her elder child. We may notice here that Rebekah never saw her beloved Jacob again, for she died before his return to his father's home, which did not take place for many years.

The story is told in the Bible without any comment, and, indeed, it requires none; for the deceit practised upon the old man was so bad, and the punishment followed so immediately, that we all must understand at once what is the moral which the story is intended to teach us. Jacob was destined by God to be the father of a great nation, but his own life was very sad. We shall see, as we continue to read the history, how the deceiver was himself in his turn cruelly deceived, first by his uncle, and afterwards by his own children; and nothing can be more melancholy than the words in which in his old age he described his past life to Pharaoh: 'The days of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; *few and evil* have been the days of the years of my life, and have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.' These striking words tell us that though Jacob became wealthy and powerful, he was never a happy man, and that it required much and long-continued affliction to purify him from his early faults.

We have now gathered the moral teaching of the story; but, before we conclude the lesson, there are two points of interest which we may dwell upon:

1. The 'savoury meat' which Isaac wished to eat. To this day, dwellers in Eastern countries are extremely fond of dishes made savoury, or highly flavoured, with a great variety of ingredients. Sweet and sour, salt and spices, are mixed with large quantities of fat or butter, and used as seasoning for the same dish. And the meat so cooked is still for the most part the flesh of animals taken in hunting, for, although the chief of a pastoral tribe would readily kill one of his sheep or goats for the entertainment of a stranger, he would look upon it as a great piece of extravagance to kill one for his own use, except on a very special occasion.

2. The 'goodly raiment' which Rebekah put upon Jacob. The words in the Hebrew, when translated literally, mean 'the great robe.' The 'great robe' belonging to Esau is generally believed to have been the robe which he wore as the first-born: it was a long, white cloak, richly embroidered and fringed, and was the garment of honour. Such vestments are preserved in Eastern shepherd tribes with the greatest care, and are handed down from father to son. It is customary, we learn, to keep them in a chest or wardrobe with aromatic herbs, which are used both to keep away moths and to give to the garments a pleasing perfume. Jacob's wearing the

robe of the first-born was an important part of the preparation for deceiving his father; and the fact that the garment was kept in perfume helps us to understand Isaac's words: 'See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.'

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Read Genesis xxviii.

No long time passed away before Jacob received the first part both of his blessing and of the punishment of his great act of deceit. Rebekah, still, it seems, ready to hide the truth from her husband, advised him to send Jacob to Padan-Aram, where her brother lived, that he might marry a wife of his own kindred, not one of the women of Canaan, as Esau had done; but she did not say a word of Esau's anger towards Jacob, or of her fear lest Jacob should be killed as a punishment for his treachery. Jacob departed with the words of his father's blessing and prayers fresh in his memory, but he seems to have known very little of their meaning. One evening, soon after his journey had begun, he found himself at sunset far from any dwelling of men where he might ask for a night's lodging. The twilight in those countries is very short, and darkness soon comes on; and it would be dangerous to try to travel in the dark through a mountainous country without regular roads. Therefore he remained where he found himself, among the hills, and took some of the stones scattered there, and used them for pillows. In the sleep of that night there came to him a dream, which taught him such a lesson as may properly be called a beginning of the blessing. The blessing altogether, as has been already mentioned, was that Jacob's descendants should be witnesses of the One True Living God. The dream was of a ladder between earth and heaven, on which the angels were ascending and descending, and at the top of which was God Himself. Jacob learnt there, and by that dream, that the world he saw around him when he was awake was not *all* the world, that above the visible world was an invisible world, and above all a Living God. And, moreover, he learnt that these two worlds were not entirely separated; there was a way from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Besides this, in his dream he heard a voice, making him know that the God of Abraham and Isaac cared for him, the poor fugitive shepherd, and would be able to protect him, not only there, but wherever he should journey.

Now, as this was a dream, a vision of the night, which was gone when the morning came, all the parts of it must be understood figuratively; there was no ladder that could be touched, no

actual appearance of God, but these things were represented to the mind of Jacob as he slept.

And then comes part of Jacob's sore punishment. If he had told the truth and acted the truth, before he left his father's home, nothing could possibly have made him more glad than the knowledge that wherever he went God would be with him. But he had done wrong, and knew that he had done wrong, and therefore he was afraid of God. Sin, as we know from the sad example of Adam and Eve, is estrangement from God. In Jacob's case we find that it made him unable to receive those blessings which God would have given him. At first, when he awoke, Jacob thought that he must have gone to sleep in a place especially visited by God, although he ought to have learnt from his vision that God is everywhere. To him, in his sin, the feeling that God was near him caused not joy, but fear. The communication between earth and heaven seemed to him to belong only to that spot which he called Beth-el—the house of God.

For our Beth-el we may have, says Mr. Ruskin, 'this place, this windy slope, this moorland hollow, torrent-bitten; this *any* place where God lets down the ladder. And how are you to know where that will be? or how are you to determine where it may be, but by being ready for it always? Do you know where the lightning is to fall next? You *do* know that partly; you can guide the lightning; but you cannot guide the going forth of the Spirit which is as that lightning when it shines from the east to the west.' This is the lesson which we may learn even from Jacob's own words, but which Jacob himself could not learn, which few of his descendants learned for at least 500 years.

Lastly, we must observe that as soon as Jacob's alarm subsided he tried to make a bargain. If God will take care of him, he will worship God. This is at variance with all we have heard before of God's covenants, but is quite consistent with what we have already learnt of Jacob's character.

The feeling in our minds as we read this chapter is one of pain. A revelation, unveiling, as it were, a certain truth about God, was made to Jacob; but his recent sin, and the character formed by his deceitful and selfish habits prevented him from understanding it; and yet it was a revelation which might have given as much comfort and strength to Jacob as it now gives to all who receive it. Let us, therefore, beware lest our own selfishness and untruthfulness leave us in the same condition of being quite unable to receive God's truth when we hear it.

NOTE.—I think that the younger scholars might be assisted in grasping the idea of an unseen world if they were made to understand that in this world there are invisible forces constantly at

work on all sides of us. Children who have had no scientific teaching are often unconscious of this fact. If, for instance, a child were made to understand that our world is kept in its orbit by the invisible force which we call the attraction of the sun, acting through a distance of ninety-two millions of miles, if he were told that in the electric telegraph an invisible force passes in a second from one end of a wire a thousand miles long to the other end of it, and there moves a pointer, or if he were shown a pocket-compass turned round, and taught that under the guidance of the invisible force of magnetism the compass-needle is always directed to a point near the North Pole, that this invisible force fills the room where he is, and operates, without his seeing it, on the compass under his nose, his imagination might be quickened, and the conception of an unseen spiritual world might become easier to him. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the existence of such a world can be demonstrated by the proved existence of unseen natural forces, but only that when a boy was told of such a world, faith in it would come easier to him if he had realised that there are forces whose presence, however near they be to us, we cannot perceive by any of our senses, and of whose existence we are only aware by seeing the effects they produce.

LESSON 25.

Epitome of Genesis xxix.—xxxi. 15.

AFTER the dream at Beth-el, Jacob went on his way to Haran, his uncle Laban's city. Like Abraham's servant who went to Haran to seek a wife for Isaac, Jacob halted at the well. There he learnt from the shepherds who were collected together to give their cattle water, that a maiden who was approaching was his cousin Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. He went to her, helped her in her work, and then told her who he was. She took him home to her father, who received him kindly. At first it seemed as if all would be well between Jacob and his new friends, but he soon found out that, although he had been clever enough to cheat his brother Esau, and impose upon his aged father, his uncle Laban was clever enough to cheat him. So Jacob was 'paid in his own coin,' that is, he was made to learn some of the evil of deception by suffering from it himself. One instance of Laban's craft was strikingly like Rebekah's conduct about Esau and Jacob: Rebekah put forward her younger son as her first-born; Laban (Rebekah's brother) promised Jacob his younger daughter Rachel, as his wife, but beguiled Jacob by sending the elder, Leah, to his tent; and then, to make amends for the trick, he promised Rachel also, provided Jacob would be his servant for seven years without other wages. If Jacob thought at all, he must have repented of his own

desire to make hard bargains. Many years passed away, during which Jacob was entirely in Laban's power, and yet was able, by clever management, to get together some property of his own. But he found that Laban did not deal fairly with him, trying to change his wages whenever he found that they were worth receiving. So at last Jacob made up his mind to return to his father, and to take his wives, his twelve children, and his flocks and herds with him. It was a trial of cunning between Laban and Jacob, and the latter, feeling that he was not a match for his uncle, resolved to go away by stealth. Therefore while Laban was absent on business, Jacob gathered all his property, and set out for Palestine.

This return journey of Jacob's must have been very different indeed from that which we have read about when he was going to Padan-Aram. Then he went all alone, and in haste, that he might escape from the vengeance of Esau. But when he was returning, he was like a Sheikh, or head of a tribe. He had large flocks and herds, which, of course, would require a great many men to drive and attend them. And his family was by no means small: there were himself, and his four wives, and his twelve children, with servants and attendants to wait upon them, besides others whose duty it was to set up the tents each night and take them down again every morning. Everything that they might want on the way would have to be carried in such a manner that they could easily get at it. In fact, it was just what we have seen in pictures of Eastern travelling—a long row of camels, with curious saddles on their backs, some loaded with poles and cloth for the tents, others with the provisions and the cooking utensils, and the beds, or rugs, etc., which are used for beds, and others carrying the men, women, and children. Such a company, if there are flocks to be driven as well as goods to be carried, cannot go at a great speed; and therefore we cannot be surprised to hear that Laban, Jacob's father-in-law, was able to overtake him before he had reached his journey's end. Laban was very angry when he found that Jacob had taken advantage of his absence to go away, and probably intended to use force to bring him back to Haran. He took men with him, and on the seventh night pitched his tents near where Jacob's were already pitched, on the Mount Gilead. In the morning he went to speak with Jacob, and reproached him for his hasty departure, but he did not attempt any injury to him, for in a dream of the night he had been warned to do Jacob no harm. Jacob and Laban were not sparing in hard words to each other, but at last they came to the conclusion that since they were about to part, it would be better to do so on good terms. They made an agreement one with the other, and feasted together, they and their chief men; and set up a pillar and a heap of stones as a

mark of their agreement, promising that neither of them would ever pass by that boundary mark to do harm to the other. Laban called the pillar 'Mizpah' (*watch*), saying: 'The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.' Then they separated. Laban returned to Haran, and Jacob advanced toward the Jordan.

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LESSON 26.

Read Genesis xxxii.

JACOB'S way to the place where Isaac lived led him very near to the district in which his injured brother Esau had settled. His message to Esau is very much like that which the chief of a strange caravan (a band of men, women and children, with camels, horses, sheep, etc.) would send now in asking leave from the sheikh of a powerful Bedawin tribe to pass through his lands. He would desire grace or favour in the sight of the sheikh, that he might be allowed to pass uninjured. He would be ready and willing to pay a certain toll or tribute to the sheikh, whose protection would be really valuable. Some of the cattle sent to the great man might be a most acceptable present, and might dispose him to friendliness. Such conduct would be quite natural in persons so situated, but it is not at all what would be expected between brothers, as Jacob and Esau. All Jacob's preparations for the meeting are what we must call abject. He could not at all understand the best parts of his brother's character—his frankness and generosity. Esau was very quick-tempered; he soon became violently angry, even so angry as to wish to kill those who offended him; but he could forget injuries more readily than Jacob. But Jacob had done the wrong, and in all the years he had been away from home he had not been able to forget it, or to believe that Esau would forgive him. Scarcely any part of the punishment that followed Jacob's deceit could have been harder to bear than this, that he had to come and bow down like a suppliant before the brother whom he had wronged and triumphed over. Every little precaution that he could think of, even to dividing his company into separate bands, and keeping that band to which his favourite wife and her children belonged nearest to himself, was adopted, and yet Jacob could not be at ease.

He had sown evil seed; now he was, as he believed, about to reap evil fruit. The evil fruit, in the degradation of his own character, was ripe within him, but that he seemed not to know or dread. What he feared was evil from without; that is, from Esau.

During the night before the expected and dreaded meeting with Esau, Jacob went through a mysterious conflict, the result of which was to teach him more about himself than he had known before. The full meaning of this conflict, and the lessons of hope and

strength to be learnt from Jacob's hard-won triumph, will not be very plain to young people till they have lived longer in the world, and have learnt much more about life from the study of their own thoughts and hearts. In more mature years they may read something more of what wise and good men have learnt about Jacob's conflict from their own inner struggles. At present we will consider only the simplest of its lessons. Jacob had lived almost entirely for himself: one of the dreadful results of that selfishness was close at hand; could he in any way get rid of it? The answer to such a question is the night-long conflict, showing that another, greater than Jacob, was striving to prevail over Jacob's selfish nature, the nature he had in common with the animals. Who could that other have been if not God who made the better, the true nature, which selfishness had covered but could not destroy; God, who made Jacob and makes us, as He made Adam, in His own image? When the morning came, the angel gave Jacob a new name, to show that a new life was to begin. Jacob, 'the supplanter,' the cheat, was conquered. Israel, 'Prince with God,' was to inherit the blessing.

We must not expect to find that, as Israel, this man was never guilty again of any of the deeds which did him, as Jacob, such grievous and lasting harm, but he did not fall into sin again without a struggle for the good and the right. In other words, he had laid to heart a lesson which always will be true, namely, that the destruction of selfishness, even at the cost of extreme pain, is the beginning of true life.¹

LESSON 27.

Jacob's Meeting with Esau, and Subsequent Travels.

ALTHOUGH Jacob had just received so great a promise, he was, nevertheless, obliged to take the consequences of the acts he had performed long ago. His conscience, probably more active than before, assured him of his wrong-doing; and when he came within sight of Esau he bowed himself to the ground seven times, by that action confessing himself Esau's servant. Esau generously ran to meet Jacob and embraced him as a brother. Then he enquired the meaning of the drove of cattle he had met. Jacob told him it was a present, 'to find grace in the sight of my lord.' Esau put back the present with the words, 'I have enough my brother;' but, being urged, at last accepted it. Notice the difference! Jacob calls Esau 'my lord,' and himself 'thy servant.' Esau says, frankly and warmly, 'my brother.' Then Esau kindly offered to accompany

¹ A sermon by Rev. F. W. Robertson, of Brighton (Sermon III., First Series), sets forth admirably

the deep spiritual meaning of this episode of Jacob's life.

Jacob on his further journey, or, at all events, to give him an escort (a band of warriors to protect him) until he should reach the place where he purposed settling; but Jacob, still suspicious, still, as it would seem, doubting whether Esau had really forgiven the past, and knowing the want of stability in Esau's character, made excuses for refusing both offers. Esau thereupon returned to his home in the southern mountains, and Jacob went on to the country of Shechem, where he bought a piece of ground and pitched his tent. After some troubles, arising from the lawless conduct of his sons, and some wanderings, in the course of which Rachel, his best-beloved wife, died, just after giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, the family came to Hebron, where Isaac was still alive. Soon after this, Isaac died, at the age of 180 years, and was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob in the cave of Machpelah.

Now follows the history of Jacob's sons, the twelve Patriarchs as they are generally called, and more particularly the history of Joseph.

The word 'Patriarch' means 'the chief of a tribe.' Such a chief would generally be an old man in a tribe of any considerable size, and so we often use 'patriarchal' when we only mean 'old.'

Although Jacob's descendants were divided into twelve *tribes*, there was, from this time, no further splitting-off of families to form quite distinct nations. The children of Isaac were distinct, as we have seen, from the Ishmaelites and other Arab races; the children of Esau also (called Edomites) were distinct from Jacob's descendants; but the 'children of Israel,' that is, of Jacob, remained, through prosperity and adversity, for good and for evil, *one race* (afterwards *one nation*) for many hundreds of years.

LESSON 28.

Read Genesis xxxvii.

In reading this chapter we can scarcely believe that such jealousies were possible among brethren. Could so slight a provocation as was given by Joseph's telling his dreams so entirely cast out brotherly love that his brothers designed to kill him? But, in truth, there were other causes for hatred.

One was, that Joseph was his father's favourite son. We saw something of the evils of family favouritism in the case of Esau and Jacob; but in Joseph's case they were far greater. It seems, indeed, as if Jacob almost encouraged Joseph to bring back to him all the news of his brothers' ill deeds.

The true cause, however, both of Jacob's partiality towards Joseph, and of the jealousy felt by the other sons, lies farther back.

They were not full-brothers at all, but only half-brothers, and their mothers were unfriendly. The children of each wife were brought up in their mother's tent, and taught by their mother to expect chief consideration. Any preference of one family to the others would seem to all the rest like an injury done to themselves. When the young men, untaught and unused to self-restraint, began life together without love, any little provocation would appear great, and would cause positive hatred. So Joseph's dreams, which seemed to himself and to those who heard them to be predictions that he should be master of them all, became reasons for deeper and deeper hatred. When, therefore, they saw him coming to them, to obtain and to carry back to Jacob news of their proceedings, they said: 'Behold this dreamer cometh: let us slay him.' The pitiful excuse of Reuben, in strict consistency with his character, as given by his father, 'unstable as water,' served only to change the form of their revenge, for revenge they were resolved to have. Reuben, it may be noticed, as the eldest of the party, had an authority over the rest which might have been sufficient to rescue Joseph completely; but he was inconstant and wavering. He went away and left Joseph still in danger, and when he came back to the pit into which they had cast Joseph, he was no longer there. One of Solomon's Proverbs, 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,' is strikingly illustrated by the conduct of these cruel and wicked men. They had still a faint sense of the claims of brotherhood, and, therefore, would not kill Joseph outright, but they had no objection to selling him into hopeless slavery, to giving him up, body and soul, to men who might do what they pleased with him. This is the first example we have in the Bible of the abominable trade in slaves, but certainly slaves had been sold before this time, or selling their brother would not have seemed so natural to a set of ignorant herdsmen.

It is uncertain whether or not Reuben was told what had become of Joseph, and whether or not he joined with the rest in the cruel trick which they agreed to play upon Jacob; but certainly he must have felt that by his carelessness he had allowed wrong—that harm had come to Joseph by his fault.

Jacob's agony at seeing the blood-stained coat of his favourite son cannot be described in other words than those of the Bible.

Now, when we read of cold, cruel acts such as that of Joseph's brethren, we must not suppose that they have no warning for us, because we are never likely to commit precisely similar acts. The same cause which leads one man to commit one kind of crime often leads another man to commit a crime of quite a different sort. The kind of evil deed into which bad thoughts lead a man necessarily depends very much upon the circumstances in which he is

placed. We shall none of us be tempted to treat anyone exactly as Joseph's brethren treated him, but many of us may be tempted to other kinds of wrong-doing by the same dark passion of jealousy which tempted them. It was, in fact, the same passion which moved Cain to kill his brother Abel; and, as we were reminded when we read the history of that great crime, it is a passion which often creeps almost unperceived into our hearts, and so is a source of danger against which all of us have the greatest need to be on our guard. The older we grow, the more clearly do we see that jealousy has been one of the greatest curses of mankind. We see how it takes various forms, domestic, sectarian, political, or national, and how it spreads discord in the world, barring the progress and improvement of our race by separating persons who ought to be working together for its common good.

LESSON 29.

Joseph in Egypt: his Temptation and Imprisonment.

IN Egypt Joseph was sold to Potiphar, one of the chief officers of the king. His prudence and honesty soon led to his advancement. He was still a slave, that is to say, he was considered as much the property of Potiphar as his house or his money. But for all that there was this difference, that the slave had a mind and will, and so was able to take care of other property. Joseph was made overseer or steward of his master's house; he had to receive all money that was due, keep account of the produce of the farm, and pay his master's debts. This he did so honestly, and with such constant remembrance of the fear of God, that, we read, God blessed Potiphar and his house for Joseph's sake.

After a time a trouble came upon Joseph even greater than his separation from his father. His master's wife tempted him to a great sin, which would have been a sin equally against God and her husband. When she found that Joseph would not yield to her first requests, she repeated them again and again, and at last tried to force him to obey her wishes. His reply to her is a lesson and an example for every young person who may be tempted to do a wrong deed. He did not speak of the danger of the discovery of the wrong-doing, but of its wickedness:—'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' and after that, when he found that his words were in vain, he ran away from the room where his mistress was. In that also he showed his good sense. If we pray, as we do every time we use the Lord's Prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation,' it is both foolish and wicked to remain in places or in company in which we know we shall be tempted. To run away is often as

brave as to remain in danger, unless by remaining we can do good to others.

After Joseph's departure the wicked woman determined on revenge. She therefore waited until her husband came home, and then accused Joseph of grossly insulting her. The master, having, as we have said, supreme power over his slave, cast Joseph into prison, where at the beginning of his imprisonment he was treated with great severity. But in the prison he was not forgetful of God, and God was with him, giving him favour in the sight of the gaoler, who employed him to assist in the charge of the prisoners.

In all his conduct as a slave and as a prisoner Joseph is an example of a truth which it is very needful that we should remember. True freedom is of the mind, not of the body. Joseph, even in the dungeon, knew that he had done right; his master owned his body, but his master's wife could not make him do wrong, and so far he was free. An English poet of the seventeenth century has expressed this truth very well. He was in prison, not for any wrong-doing, but for what he had learnt to believe was his duty, and from his prison he wrote to one whom he loved—

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for a hermitage:
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

In the prison with Joseph were two of the servants of the king, the chief butler and the chief baker. The duty of the first was to attend to the drink, and the other to the food of the king. From their being in prison together it has been supposed that Pharaoh had reason to suspect some plot against his life. Such plots were in after times so common in some Eastern nations that the king never ate or drank anything of which his seneschal or cupbearer (chief baker or chief butler) had not tasted in his presence. Pharaoh's chief butler and his chief baker had dreams in the prison which made them sad, and when they told their dreams to Joseph he interpreted them. The chief butler, he said, would soon be restored to his office and to the king's favour, but the chief baker would be put to death. So it came to pass. We must remember this about the dreams and Joseph's interpretation of them, for otherwise the next reading from the Bible will be difficult to understand.

LESSON 30.

Egypt.—Geography and Physical Character.

FOR the better understanding of that part of the Bible history which tells of the dwelling of the Israelites in Egypt, and of their departure from Egypt, we ought to know something about the land itself, and about the manners and the religion of the people. The first of these subjects may be conveniently treated in this place in a separate lesson.

On looking at a map of Africa, we see in the north-east a long river, the Nile, flowing into the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile, *the* river, is the life of Egypt. It flows in a shallow valley which lies between two ranges of hills, and Egypt is the northern part of the valley, that is, the part nearest to the Mediterranean Sea. The country is usually spoken of as divided into two parts, Upper and Lower Egypt, the division being a line drawn across the valley near where the city of Cairo now stands. Egypt is not the only country which is thus divided into Upper and Lower. Canada is divided in the same way. The reason of the names is plain. A river always flows from higher ground to lower ground; its source is always something, and often very much, higher than its mouth. So, 'down a river' always means 'towards the sea,' while 'up the river' means 'inland.' Lower Egypt is that part which is nearest to the mouth of the Nile, and Upper Egypt is that which is inland. Below, or to the north of Cairo, the Nile spreads out like a fan into several streams, which fall separately into the sea. This fan-shaped piece of land, called the Delta, because it resembles in form the Greek letter of that name, was in former times the most fertile part of the country, since it was most plentifully supplied with water. Lower Egypt, which includes the Delta, was the scene of the history we are reading, and Goshen, of which we shall hear very soon, was its north-east corner.

The climate of Egypt is very healthy, and very free from extremes of heat or cold. The most singular fact about it is that rain seldom or never falls. Cultivation has never been dependent upon rain, as it is in other countries. Yet the land is fertile, and we know that without water fertility is impossible. The lack of rain is made up for by an annual overflow of the river. Until very recently, people did not know the cause of this overflow, or inundation, as it is called. Quite lately, however, Sir Samuel Baker, a distinguished traveller, has given an explanation which seems satisfactory. The Nile as it passes through Egypt is a single stream. We may observe one black mark on the map, with no smaller marks to show where small streams flow into it. But far up the country there is a place where two great streams join; these

are the Blue Nile from the mountains of Abyssinia, and the White Nile from the great lakes. The latter of these streams keeps almost always the same level, but the Blue Nile is at certain seasons very much more full than it is at others. The heavy rains in the mountains of Abyssinia, Sir S. Baker says, make the difference. When the Blue Nile is flooded, the bed of the river below the union of the branches (i.e. to the north) is not large enough to carry all the water, which accordingly rises, and pours over all the country through gaps in the banks. We, in England, should be very much surprised and alarmed if we saw all our fields covered with water and looking like part of the sea, but the Egyptians know better. The river, when it overflows, brings with it from the south country a very large quantity of mud which gradually settles down on the fields, and does them more good than the best manure could do, applied artificially. When the water begins to run off the land again, the farmers sow their seed, and about the middle of the next year reap abundant crops. If the river did not overflow, there would be famine in the land.

* The chief crop grown in Egypt in the ancient times was wheat, which is still largely grown and exported to other countries. About 1,800 or 1,900 years ago Egyptian corn was so much esteemed that Egypt was called 'the granary of the world.'

Of course, such things as mountains and rivers do not change very rapidly, and yet, we are told, some changes can be traced which must have happened since Joseph was in Egypt. At that time, besides the natural branches of the Nile which form the Delta, there were many canals dug to convey the water of the river to parts which would otherwise be desert. The mismanagement of more recent rulers has spoiled these canals, and most of them are now closed. In addition to this, some of the natural branches are now almost dry. We must, therefore, think of the Egypt about which we read as a far more fertile and better-cultivated country than that which travellers see now.

One important plant which used to grow by the river is now scarcely to be found in Egypt. This was the papyrus reed, which the Egyptians used in making books, and from which the ark was made in which Moses floated.

LESSON 31.

Read Genesis xli. 1—32.

In this passage we read of further dreams, which led to very important results.

Pharaoh, on awakening, after he had dreamt about the two sorts of cattle and the two sorts of ears of wheat, felt that his

dreams were intended to tell him something, but he could not discover by his own meditations, nor could all his wise men tell him, what their lesson was. While he was trying all means for discovering the interpretation of his dreams, his chief butler remembered the dream which he had had two years before, and which had been interpreted by the poor young slave, Joseph. Joseph had told all his history to the chief butler, and had besought him to do what he could to have the facts laid before Pharaoh, in order that an innocent man might no longer be treated as a criminal. But the chief butler had been so glad of his own release from prison, which took place exactly as Joseph had said it would, that he had forgotten all about Joseph and his sufferings, until this difficulty of the king's brought back the whole of the circumstances to his memory. Then, confessing his ingratitude, he told Pharaoh all the story. Pharaoh's conduct on hearing his chief butler's tale is to be noticed as a proof of his wisdom. The Egyptians were a very proud people, and had some reason for their pride. They were the cleverest and most highly civilised people then living in the world. Pharaoh might very naturally have thought: 'I have asked my wise counsellors, who are the wisest men in the world, and they cannot explain my dreams. It would be absurd to suppose that a poor prisoner, not even an Egyptian, but one of a wandering family of shepherds in Canaan, can tell me more than they.' But Pharaoh was wise enough to know that wisdom is not the property of any nation or class, and therefore he sent for Joseph, and asked him to interpret the dreams, as courteously and kindly as if he had been addressing a king, not a slave.

Next, we must notice Joseph's conduct. Pharaoh spoke to him as if it were by his own wisdom that he could interpret hard things. Joseph at once told the king that all the wisdom he possessed came from God, and that without God's help he could understand nothing. Three times he assured Pharaoh that he was only God's servant (verses 16, 25, 32). Now, since we are neither kings nor interpreters of dreams, it might appear that we have no lesson to learn from the conduct either of Pharaoh or of Joseph. But there are two lessons, at all events. 1. A wise man is well worth listening to, wherever he may be found. Our likes and dislikes should never prevent our learning even from those whom we consider less clever than ourselves. Still less should we allow any difference of station to prejudice us against any person. That is Pharaoh's teaching. 2. From Joseph we receive a lesson quite as plain, as useful, and as important. Our knowledge, whether it be much or little, is the result of using gifts bestowed upon us by God. Refusing to learn is abusing God's gifts; thinking of the power to

acquire knowledge as our own possession, and being proud of what we acquire, is downright ingratitude.

The whole narrative, as showing God's care for the Egyptians, teaches the same truth as the preservation of the boy Ishmael, namely, that God's love and mercy are over all men.

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LESSON 32.

Read Genesis xli. 33—57.

THE purpose for which Joseph was taken from his prison and brought before the King of Egypt was that he might give an interpretation of the king's dreams. He told the king that there would be seven very plenteous years followed by seven years of great scarcity and famine. The interpretation of the dreams was finished, but Joseph went on speaking to Pharaoh, and giving him very good advice as to what he should do to make the suffering from the famine as little felt in Egypt as possible. His advice was that Pharaoh should prevent any wastefulness during the years of the plenteous harvests, by taking up—that is, buying or demanding as a tax—the fifth part of the produce of all the land. (Suppose a man had a farm which produced 500 bushels of corn, he would have to sell or give 100 bushels to the king, if Joseph's plan were followed.) The other four-fifths would be quite sufficient for the food of the people and for seed; so that what was taken up by the king might be kept as a store to supply the people when they began to be in want. The plan appeared to Pharaoh so good that he resolved upon carrying it out, and could think of no man who would be so good a superintendent, so 'discreet and wise' a man, as this Joseph who had given the advice. He commanded, therefore, that Joseph should at once be made the chief ruler of Egypt, under himself. He gave him an Egyptian name and an Egyptian wife, and gave orders that all men in the land should obey him. Now, from this history come two very simple and important lessons.

1. Joseph's wise advice teaches us the use of preparing beforehand for times of want and necessity. The virtue which leads men to make provision for the future is called prudence; and is one which, almost more than any other, may be learnt. It is from never having learnt prudence that many persons are always poor, and are not able to meet any unforeseen difficulty. They have, perhaps, at some time possessed plenty of those things which are needed for life; but so long as plenty lasted they used it wastefully, so that when it came to an end they fell into want. The number of proverbs in praise of prudence is almost countless. 'Waste not, want not,' and 'Frugality is a great income,' are short and easily

remembered. Let us not think that those who have not much to save cannot waste much. That may be partly true, but if we think that waste does not matter, if what is wasted is only a small quantity, we make a great mistake. The actual quantity of the food or money, or whatever it may be, that we save prudently, is not half so important as the habit of prudent saving. Children and young people can learn this habit more easily than grown-up men and women, and those who in early life get into the habit of being careful over a penny, will most probably be equally prudent when in after life they have to do with pounds. Remember that no wise person wishes young people to be mean, miserly, or stingy. They should learn prudence not that they may keep all they get for themselves, but that they may learn to use what they get wisely instead of foolishly.

Not very many of the people who build our hospitals, churches, and schools would be able to do so, unless they had learnt not to waste their wealth on useless things. And those who wish to be like them, and to be able to be generous, must learn first, and learn while they are young, to deny themselves present pleasures for the sake of future solid advantages.

Prudence may also be used in gaining knowledge. Perhaps a child may not want to use immediately all that is taught at school, but yet one ought to learn in childhood the things that will strengthen the mind to make one useful in after life. Young people should remember that they are either making wise preparation for the future, or else they are living as human beings ought not to live, without thought or care for the future at all.

2. The second lesson we may learn is from Joseph's advancement. How came he to be fit for the post of chief ruler of so large and important a kingdom as Egypt was? Partly, because he had done his duty in whatever state of life he had been placed: in Potiphar's house and in the prison he had worked diligently; he had learnt to obey, and therefore knew how to command. But this was not all. He was in the habit of asking himself about everything, What will it be right to do? The thought of pleasure came after that of duty. He had not tried to please himself, but to please God. And this is not entirely distinct from our first lesson. The prudence we considered first is called worldly wisdom, but the highest prudence of all is the love and fear of God, which form a provision for the long future; not for the future of this life only, but the future of eternity. St. Paul tells his young friend Timothy: 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.'

LESSON 33.

Read Genesis xlii.

HERE we see how Joseph's boyish dreams began to come true. The famine affected not only the land of Egypt, but also the countries round about. Among those who had heard that there was corn in Egypt were Joseph's brethren, who undertook the journey from Canaan to obtain food for themselves and their families. It would have been very unwise in Joseph to sell corn at once to all comers without making some enquiry about them, and finding out whether they were friends or enemies. The corn which was stored up in the storehouses had been grown on Egyptian soil, saved by the orders of the Egyptian ruler, for the benefit, first of all, of the Egyptian people. It would have been unfair to the people of the country to allow them to run the risk of perishing by starvation, by disposing of the corn to other people who might come upon them in their time of trouble, and conquer them. But there was a special reason besides, for the fear of spies coming to spy out the nakedness of the land; and especially for fear of people coming from Canaan. We find out from Egyptian history that, at a time not long before that of which we are reading, Lower Egypt, that part of the country where these events took place, had been invaded by hosts of pastoral people from Canaan. The invaders subdued the whole of the lower country and established their chiefs as kings. The native Egyptians were either driven further south, or kept as slaves to the conquerors. The shepherd kings, as they were called, were looked upon with dread by the Egyptians, and we can well understand how suspicious they would be when strange people came to them from the same part of the world as their oppressors. Of course Joseph was not imposed upon: he did not share the fear; for we are told that he recognised his ten brethren at once; but the common fear of the Egyptians gave him an excuse for calling them spies, and for keeping one of them a prisoner, to make sure that they would come again. All this he did, we discover, in order that he might force them to bring his own younger brother, Benjamin, with them when they came again.

If we remember how harshly and cruelly his brothers had treated him, and how, for many years after this time, revenge seemed to nearly all men much more manly than forgiveness, we are obliged to admire Joseph's forbearance all the more. Perhaps his own troubles had taught him patience; he was fit to command because he had learnt to obey. At first he made himself strange and hard, and imprisoned all his brethren; if he had killed them or made slaves of them for life there was nobody to find fault with him for doing so. But he took a nobler revenge: he kept one as a

pledge, and let the others depart, carrying with them a plentiful supply of corn. As he was the chief agent of the king in the selling of the corn we must understand that he gave them the price of the corn, which he returned to them, out of his own pocket. All the while he could scarcely command himself; in speaking to them, and in hearing what they said, he was so overcome by his feelings that he was obliged to go away from them and weep. The twenty years' absence, and the cruelty which caused that absence, were forgotten. He loved them still, and only wanted to know about his father and Benjamin.

The effect upon the sons of Jacob, of the harsh reception which they met with, is scarcely less remarkable. Twenty years before they had sold Joseph as a slave: in the meantime, it seems, they had lived in what they considered comfort; but when they got into trouble their first thought was of their old cruelty. Remembering even the words of entreaty with which the poor boy had besought them to do him no harm, and recalling his anguish of soul, they said that because they would not listen then, therefore evil was come upon them now. What was the meaning of this trouble of theirs? It meant that they, wild, wicked, and cruel men as they had been, had consciences, and that at last their consciences had begun to speak. So, very probably, it may be at some time with some of us. Sooner or later, if we have done wrong, our consciences will bring us to account, and no amount of comfort and prosperity will keep down the feeling that we are miserable. Still more, if troubles fall upon us, shall we feel their power. Misfortune comes upon good men and bad men alike, but the bad men find it harder to bear, because they know that they have deserved it as the punishment of their misdeeds.

LESSON 34.

Read Genesis xliii.

JACOB refused to comply with the command of the (unknown) governor of Egypt. 'My son,' he said, 'shall not go down with you.' Reuben, easily moved, but easily forgetful, offered the lives of his own two sons as a pledge for Benjamin's safety; as if the death of two grandsons could make any atonement to the old man for the loss of the son of his age. When the corn, brought from Egypt, was all consumed, Jacob wished his sons to go again and buy more. They told him that their going without Benjamin would be of no use; and then Jacob, with his old distrustfulness, accused them of having brought trouble upon him, by their forwardness in telling the governor that they had another brother.

After much questioning they set out at last, taking Benjamin

with them, and making all possible preparation to ensure kind treatment from Joseph. They believed that the money which they had paid for the corn they bought on their first visit had been put into their bags in order that the Egyptian governor might be able to bring a charge of dishonesty against them; they therefore carried double money, to pay the old debt and the new as well. They also took, according to a custom still common in Eastern countries, a present for the governor, that he might be disposed to listen favourably to their explanations. When they came to Egypt they were taken to Joseph's house. The sense of their guilt was still strong, and they could not believe that they were taken there for any good. So they began at once to declare to the steward their freedom from any dishonest intentions, and were only partly comforted by his telling them that he had received their money in full. Then, after Simeon had been released, they made ready their little present, and waited till the great man should come. At his coming they all bowed down to the earth, thus, although they did not know it, fulfilling that very dream which had been one of the causes of their hatred to Joseph. Joseph's enquiries after the health of their father, and his welcome of his brother Benjamin, with the scene, which they did not witness, in his own private room, show us how warm his affection for his own family still was.

The feast which he made for them, and the arrangement of the men in order of age made them wonder, but their fears were gone; they made merry, that is, they enjoyed themselves with him. But still Joseph did not tell them who he was; and in all his communication with them he never let them know that he understood what they were saying; for he spoke to them through an interpreter.

All these things are so naturally described that we seem to see and hear what is going on just as if we were ourselves present.

But there is one point given in a very few words which may easily be overlooked, and which affords occasion for some useful remarks. The steward of Joseph's house told the brethren that God had given them treasure in their sacks. How would he, who was not at all of the same country with them, who was very probably an idolater, know anything about the God of their father? It seems reasonable to suppose that he knew that Joseph had come from Canaan, and that he had heard from Joseph something about the God, of whom no images were made, whom his forefather Abraham worshipped. If this be true, we see how great is the influence of one good man. It does not appear that Joseph was always talking about God; but, what was much better, he was always acting as he knew God would have him act. In this way he was a preacher of righteousness; not by talking about it, but by doing it. So also may each of us be, and so shall we best obey the

Saviour's teaching: 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

LESSON 35.

Read Genesis xliv.

THE last trial to which Joseph put his brethren before making himself known to them was a very severe one.

They had talked very much about their honesty, and had brought their youngest brother Benjamin to Egypt, as a proof that they were 'true men.' How very dreadful it must have been for them all, when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack! Such a return for the hospitable treatment they had received from the ruler must have seemed doubly wrong, when they were forced to believe the evil deed to have been done by that brother whom the ruler had treated with double honour and kindness.

The danger in which Benjamin was, excited in the hearts of the others pity for him, affection for their aged father, and, what was better than either of these feelings, a readiness to sacrifice themselves for his good. It is true that there was some selfishness still mingled with their self-sacrifice, but men who had not learnt self-restraint when they were young could not be expected all at once to reach the highest form of virtue. Judah's speech to Joseph is, however, the noblest which we have heard from any of the sons of Jacob. In the years which had passed since Joseph was sold into Egypt, Judah, who was nearly the oldest of the brothers, had learnt by experience what it was to have and to lose children. He could therefore understand what his father's feelings would be, and exerted himself to the utmost to save him from pain.

It is very remarkable that in this speech of Judah, and in all the communications respecting their family which were made by the brethren to Joseph, they refer to one brother (Joseph himself) as dead. Their words are: 'One is not.' From this fact we may learn a lesson, which is perhaps painful, but is nevertheless very important. How could they speak of him as dead whom they had sold as a slave? They may have thought that his life as a slave would be a short life, but they could not be sure of anything of the kind. That does not seem to be the true reason why they spoke as they did, as we shall soon see from what follows.

Twenty years before, they had gone home to their father, after their cruel conduct towards Joseph, and had shown to their father a coat stained with blood, which they said they had found, asking him whether he knew whose coat it was. Jacob recognised it as the coat of many colours which he had given to Joseph, and began lamenting Joseph as dead. The sons, even if they did not tell a

wilful falsehood, wilfully acted a falsehood, when they pretended to comfort Jacob, and console him for the loss of his most loved son. From being obliged to speak of Joseph as dead, when they were in their father's presence, they got into the habit of speaking of him, and afterwards, it seems, of thinking of him, as dead, when they were conversing among themselves. They told their lie so cleverly and so often that at last they did not know that it was a lie. Even before a stranger they kept up the same story.

Now this is one of the most terrible consequences of every transgression, and especially of every disregard of truth. If one evil deed could go by itself, the result of sin to him who commits it, would not be so dreadful as it is. But one bad deed requires others to justify it; one false word especially leads to other false words, till at last there seems to be scarcely any difference at all between truth and falsehood.

This is the worst and last of all the bad effects of telling or acting a lie. It is very bad to deceive other people; it is worse to know that one does not deserve to be believed; it is worst of all to be so self-deceived as not to know whether what one says is true or false.

LESSON 36.

Read Genesis xlv.

THE distress of his brethren, and more particularly Judah's description of the pain their father would suffer in losing Benjamin, determined Joseph to make himself known to them. That he, whom they had sold as a slave, was really the governor of the whole land of Egypt was more than they could believe. They trembled before him and were unable to speak. Doubtless, judging by their own old revengeful feelings, they thought that now, having them in his power, he would inflict the severest punishment upon them. Very likely the kindness of his words and deeds was a much more severe punishment to them than if he had made them slaves for life. To be not only forgiven, but also benefited, by one whom we have injured, ought to make us more and more sorry, and more ashamed of ourselves for the harm we have done. Joseph's address to them is a wonderful example of noble moderation and tenderness towards those now convicted of their offences against him. He gently turns their minds from fear of his resentment to the thought of God's Providence. They had intended harm to Joseph when they sold him to the Ishmaelite slave-dealers, but out of evil God's Providence had brought good. They themselves would have died in the famine but for the wisdom and prudence of the brother whom they hated and despised. It cannot be thought that Joseph wished them not to be sorry for the wrong they had done; for without

repentance for past evil deeds no man can begin to do good: what he meant was that they ought to be thankful to God for preventing evil results, and for using even their sin as a means of good to thousands of their fellow creatures.

Of course it would be wicked and foolish if we were to say that because God brings good out of evil, therefore we may as well do what is wrong as what is right. If our bad deeds are turned to good we are still responsible for the evil we intended, and if our honest intentions, when carried into effect, result in some harm, still God, who is just and merciful, will judge us according to our good desires. Doing wrong is acting *against* God; doing good is acting *with* Him.

Joseph let Pharaoh know that he had found his relatives, and Pharaoh was well pleased to hear the news. Joseph had intended to invite his father and brethren to live with him, at his expense, until the years of famine came to an end; but when the news reached Pharaoh he offered them a home and sustenance. They should 'eat the fat of the land.'

Let us observe the wisdom of Joseph's advice to his brethren when they went away: 'See that ye fall not out by the way.' He probably wished to remind them that the wrong they had done him was caused by their want of trust in and love for each other. His advice, then, means: 'If you are really sorry for the violence you committed against me, show your sincerity by not doing anything of the same kind in future; and make sure of your keeping to your good resolution by not even quarrelling with one another. Go and give my message to our father, and return as soon as possible, to live here in peace with me, and in peace among yourselves.'

LESSON 37.

Read Genesis xli. 1-7 and 28—xlvii. 12.

THIS lesson shows us the beginning of one of the most important periods in the history of the nation of Israel, namely, their long sojourn in Egypt. Probably neither Jacob nor his sons understood at first the importance of the step they were taking. A former lesson stated that Abraham was told that before his descendants entered upon the possession of the land of Canaan they should be subjected to another people, and afterwards delivered from their bondage by God's power. Going down to Egypt, where Joseph was, next to Pharaoh, the most powerful man, did not seem like preparation for the enslavement of the whole family. But in fact it was so. And of this Jacob seems to have had some intimation in the vision he had at Beersheba, and in the promise that his seed should surely return and possess the land. From Beersheba

to the borders of Egypt is now, and probably always was, a dreary desert journey over barren land. As they drew near to Egypt, Judah, who seems to have been more like a man of business than the rest, went forward to warn Joseph of their approach, and to ask him to come and welcome his father. The feelings of the father and the son were too deep for words; they wept a good while, and Jacob expressed himself willing to die, because, having seen Joseph once again, he thought he had nothing more to live for.

Before Joseph left them, to make the necessary arrangements with Pharaoh for their settlement, he instructed them very carefully that they were to tell the king that they were shepherds, and always had been, that they had never done any other work, and did not know how to do any. He added the very curious reason: 'For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.' This reason leads us to a piece of history, or rather what is believed to be history, the credibility of which is confirmed a few verses on in the next lesson.

A former lesson spoke of the invasion of Egypt by hosts of shepherds, and stated that the shepherd kings were not liked by the native Egyptians. Many learned men, who have compared the history of Joseph with that of Egypt as it is found out from Egyptian records still preserved, tell us that the Pharaoh who advanced Joseph was, himself, one of these shepherd kings. He would therefore feel personally interested in the shepherds who were coming into his dominions, and at the same time would wish them to settle in some place where they would not interfere with his Egyptian subjects, nor the Egyptians with them. The land of Goshen, where he made them dwell, was better suited for the pastoral life than any other district in Egypt. It was near enough to the river to be fertile, especially in grass, and near enough to the desert to prevent the men who had been accustomed to wandering from feeling confined and uncomfortable. We must remember what Jacob said about the sorrows of his life; we shall have to refer back to it soon.

LESSON 38.

Read Genesis xlvii. 13—31.

UP to this time we have seen Joseph acting for the king in distributing corn; now we find him in a different capacity. So far his duties had been a mere exercise of humanity, but a time came when in the discharge of those duties he was able to render an important service to the State. For some time the Egyptians were able to pay money for the corn which they bought out of the storehouses, filled during the years of plenty; but at length money failed. When they came to Joseph and stated that they

had no more money, Joseph told them that he would take cattle instead. The exchange of corn for horses, asses, sheep, and cattle, went on for one year, till all the stock was transferred to Joseph for the king, and still the famine was not at an end. Then came Joseph's opportunity. He bought all the land for Pharaoh, giving the former proprietors food to the value of their land. If we are right in believing that this Pharaoh belonged to a race which had invaded Egypt, this transfer of the land to him and the voluntary submission of the people to his commands was the completion of the conquest. At all events, a rearrangement of all the land was made; the people were caused to dwell in appointed cities, and received back their land under certain conditions. If, as is probable, the former divisions of the land had been irregular, and taxation uncertain, it was an advantage to the people as well as to the monarch that all the property should pass into the king's possession, and be redistributed, subject to a tax of one-fifth of the produce. A tax of one-fifth seems very large, but if it covered all demands, leaving four-fifths clear to the cultivators of the soil, it was a very fair arrangement. Charges for public works, war expenses, costs of government, payment of police, &c., would all be included in the one contribution.

The people, at any rate, did not consider themselves harshly treated, for they said to Joseph, when the arrangement was made: 'Thou hast saved our lives.'

The Greek historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt long after the time of Joseph, and about 450 years before Christ, describes a system of land tenure and taxation very much like that which Joseph instituted.

LESSON 39.

Read Genesis xlviii.

THE end of Jacob's life is in many respects more pleasing to read and to think about than any part of his earlier history. None of the actions of his youth or middle age are mentioned with approval in the New Testament, but in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 21) we find this reference to the event of which we have just read: 'By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph.'

There are certain points in the narrative which require careful notice.

In it we find almost the first expression on Jacob's part of gratitude to God for all His mercies. He says to Joseph: 'I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed' (or children). And again, he speaks of God as 'the God which fed me all my life long unto this day.'

His speech to Joseph contains a tender remembrance of his best-beloved wife Rachel, Joseph's mother. It was for her sake, it seems, that he adopted Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own, and ordered; or foretold, that tribes of the nation which would grow out of his family should bear the names of Ephraim and Manasseh, just as other tribes should bear the names of Reuben and Simeon.

In the blessing of Joseph's sons we notice that Jacob set the younger, Ephraim, before his elder brother, Manasseh. The same change had occurred before: Isaac was preferred to Ishmael, Jacob himself to Esau, and Joseph to his elder brothers. In the future history we shall find two other remarkable instances of the same kind of preference. Moses was younger than Aaron, and yet was set before him; David was the youngest of the sons of Jesse, and was chosen to be king over all Israel. After blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob, knowing that his end was near, called all his sons to his bedside, and gave them an address, in which he told them what would happen in time to come to them and their descendants. The few words spoken of each son describe most accurately the character of each, and also the fortunes of the tribes which sprang from them.

His last words expressed the wish that he might be buried in the sepulchre bought by Abraham in the cave of Machpelah. His request was attended to; his body was embalmed and taken to Machpelah for burial. From what we know of the durability of bodies which have been embalmed, or, as they are usually called, 'mummies,' it is very probable that if we could gain entrance to the cave of Machpelah we should find Jacob's embalmed body, just as it was laid there more than 3,000 years ago.

But, whether Jacob's body remains or not, it is quite certain that something of far greater interest and importance to us does remain, and that is the lesson of his life. We have seen, in the passages of his history which we have read, many details of his character; now, since we have heard of his death, seems a fitting time for trying to get a general idea of his character as a whole, and for examining how the details influenced each other.

We may sum up the worst side of Jacob's character in two words—deceit and distrust. Deceit certainly characterised his early life; distrust was quite as marked a feature of his character in maturity and old age.

Let us consider some examples.

On his return from Padan-Aram, Esau met him kindly and frankly; yet Jacob refused to trust him, even as a travelling companion.

When his sons came back the first time from Egypt to Canaan,

and said that the governor of Egypt required them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin, he showed his distrust by the question: 'Why dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?'

When Joseph had made himself known to his brethren, and sent to invite Jacob to come into Egypt, Jacob would not believe; he mistrusted his sons until he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent.

Now these two characteristics, deceit and distrust, are most closely connected. Jacob had deceived others, and one part of the punishment that he received for his deceit was constant suspicion and distrust: he could not help fearing that others were trying to deceive him.

There are, of course, higher reasons why we should always be truthful than fear of the consequences of deceit; but this reason is not without its weight. Deceit is in itself quite bad enough, but it is made more dreadful by the constant distrust which grows out of it. An untruthful or deceitful person is almost always miserable, for he has made himself a prey to the dreadful fear that others will take advantage of him and deceive him. Moreover, our leaving off deceit will not get rid of all the consequences; this feeling of distrust tormented Jacob most when he was, as we have reason to hope, trying to amend his life, and to live according to God's will.

The whole character of Jacob, as we read it, is of a piece; and has a lesson of encouragement as well as of warning. He often did wrong, and was sorely punished for his sins; but those punishments, which caused him so much pain and sorrow, brought him at last to true penitence and peace.

LESSON 40.

Read Genesis 1. 14—26.

AFTER the funeral of Jacob the old dread returned to the minds of his sons. They could not forget the wrong that they had done to Joseph, and would not believe that he had forgiven them. 'He treated us kindly only because he would not vex or worry our father; now that our father is dead he will surely take his revenge.' So they said in their hearts, and sent a messenger to Joseph humbly asking his forgiveness, and telling him that in acting thus they were carrying out Jacob's last commands. They did not even yet understand Joseph. His tender affection for them, though they had tried to injure him, would not allow him to hear such a request unmoved. His answer to the messenger is not recorded, but we shall not be far wrong in supposing that the cause of his weeping

was the thought that his brethren believed him capable of taking advantage of their unprotected state. When they themselves came to him and repeated their petition, he asked them: 'Am I in the place of God?' The question is full of meaning. 'If you are sorry for your sin against me, know that, so far as you really harmed me, I have forgiven you; but if you want to be free from the guilt of your sin, I cannot take that away. Ask forgiveness of God.' Before his death, Joseph repeated to his sons and nephews—'the children of Israel,' as they began to be called—the old promise that they should at last inherit the land of Canaan, and made them swear that, when the time came for their departure from Egypt, they would take his body with them and bury it in the land of promise. The death of Joseph, which took place when he was 110 years old, ends the first or introductory period of the history of Israel.

With this lesson we conclude our readings from the book of Genesis. The events it records are so numerous and important that it will be well for us to make a brief recapitulation of them.

We began by reading about the Creation. We heard how the world and all things therein were made by God, and how man was distinguished from all other living creatures by being made in the image of God. We read immediately afterwards how man's disobedience to God's commands separated him from God, and rendered him liable to pain, sorrow, and death. We found that very soon the dark passion of jealousy caused a grievous crime—viz., the murder of one of the sons of Adam and Eve by his elder brother. After that we traced the division of mankind into two great families, the Sethites and the Cainites, and the gradual growth of wickedness in both divisions. We remarked two illustrious exceptions to the general depravity of mankind in the cases of Enoch and Noah. We read then of the terrible punishment which God inflicted upon the guilty world, and of the deliverance of Noah and his family from the flood which drowned all the rest of mankind. We tried to learn a little about the way in which the world was re-peopled, and then our attention was called to one family, and especially to one man. We read how Abram was called by God, and how, in obedience to God's calling, he left his home and journeyed into Canaan. In the case of Abram, whose name was changed to Abraham, we saw the elevating power of faith in God. The most remarkable instance of Abraham's faith which we considered was his all-but-completed sacrifice of his only son Isaac. We read how a glorious future was opened to Abraham's mind by the promise that in his seed, which should descend from Isaac, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. At the same time we read of a promise that from Ishmael, Abraham's other son, a great nation should take its origin. Of Isaac's life we have been able to dis-

cover very little, except the fact and the circumstances of his marriage; but the history of his two sons, Esau and Jacob, furnished us with many important lessons. In Jacob we found a very remarkable illustration of the long, sad consequences which arise from the harbouring in the mind of evil desires, and of the afflictions which are needed to purify one who has yielded to evil. We read of the jealousy and cruelty of Jacob's sons towards their brother Joseph, and of the great benefit to them and their children which God in His wisdom brought out of their great sin. We have seen how Joseph was actuated all his life through by one great principle—namely, by the desire to serve and obey God; and how his faithful service was rewarded. We have read quite recently of the famine which visited Egypt and Canaan, of the migration of Jacob and his family into Egypt, and of their settlement in the land of Goshen. We have read of the death and burial of Jacob, and, in to-day's lesson, of the death of Joseph.

The history is divided into two parts: (1) that of mankind; (2) that of the seed of Abraham. As we proceed to read other parts of the Bible we shall find the Bible narratives confined almost entirely to the history of that part of Abraham's descendants which was sprung from Jacob, or Israel; and, therefore, for the future we shall have to speak chiefly of Israelitish history.

LESSON 41.

Israel in Egypt to Birth of Moses.

Our last lesson concluded with a summary of the events of which we have read the history in the book of Genesis; to-day we begin the second book of the Bible, named 'Exodus.' That name means 'going out,' and describes the principal event recorded in the book—namely, the going out, or departure, of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt.

Our present lesson will treat of the condition of the Israelites in Egypt, to show why they would desire to leave that land, and why their departure was and is considered so important an event.

During Joseph's life his brethren and their families were under his protection; at his death they were, for his sake, taken under the protection of the king Pharaoh. The friendly connection between the heirs of that king and the descendants of Jacob probably lasted for some time. But we find from Egyptian history that there were often changes in the ruling families. One dynasty—that is, one set of kings succeeding each other in peace—would at last come to an end, because some more powerful people would fight against them and take the throne for themselves. About the time of which we are reading there were many such changes of

dynasty. One fact must be mentioned here in order that we may not be confused in our thoughts about the Egyptian kings. All of them, no matter to what dynasty they belonged, had the name Pharaoh. The name means 'the sun,' and seems to be used as a title of the office of king rather than a name of a person. This we must remember, for if we fancied that whenever we read about Pharaoh we are reading about the same person we should be constantly puzzled. At this time, the Bible says, 'there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.' Of course, if the new king gained the kingdom by conquest, he would not be likely to show much favour to the family of Jacob, who were friends and guests of the old kings. Two courses were open to him; either to drive them out of Egypt, or to keep them there as slaves. The latter he chose as the wiser of the two; for by it he could make them work for him, and prevent their assisting his enemies. He set them to build certain treasure-cities, which were named Pithom and Raameses.

The old pictures found in Egypt teach us a great deal of the history and the manners and customs of the Egyptians, and also of the way in which the Israelites were treated. Some of those pictures show great multitudes of people, captives or slaves, doing such kinds of hard work as drawing along by means of ropes large logs of wood and huge blocks of stone—such work, indeed, as we have done by horses; and all the while there are Egyptians, overseers, standing by with whips which they use to make the slaves pull hard, no matter how tired they may be. This was how the new Pharaoh made the Israelites labour; and his subjects, the Egyptians, thought him very wise and clever, and as far as they could they imitated him; that is, as we read, they made the lives of the Israelites bitter. This treatment, however, did not prevent the Israelites from multiplying so very rapidly that Pharaoh and the Egyptians grew afraid of them. At last Pharaoh invented a still more cruel and wicked plan for lessening the numbers of the people whom he feared and hated. He ordered that every son that was born of Israelite parents should be cast into the river Nile. But this order, cruel as it was, had exactly the contrary effect to that which Pharaoh hoped for. It was one of the means used by God for the deliverance of the Israelites and the punishment of the Egyptians.

We may now read from the Bible one of its most beautiful stories (Exodus ii. 1-10): 'And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the

flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done with him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.'

The child Moses, who was thus saved from death, and taken into Pharaoh's family, afterwards became the leader of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and could scarcely have been made fit to become their leader in any other way. This, then, is a lesson showing God's Providence, by which we mean His constant care to bring about His own purposes in spite of all human opposition. The very order of the wicked king was used by God as a means of putting Moses under suitable training for the work he was called to do—the deliverance of his people from slavery.

LESSON 42.

Read Exodus ii. 11—25.

THIS passage of Scripture teaches us much about the character of Moses, the same noble character which he displayed all through his life.

We must remember that when he was taken to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter he was removed from all danger of being compelled to share the hardships of the children of Israel, for he became what we should call a prince, and lived in the enjoyment of every luxury. Even in our own time it is very common for a man who has risen to a higher station in life than that in which he was born to forget all about his poor relations, or, if he remembers them, to look down upon them as if they were a disgrace to him. Moses did not act so; his nobility appeared in his trying to do what he could for those who were of his own flesh and blood, even though they were poor and oppressed slaves.

To understand the character of Moses it is important to bear in mind how much he gave up for the sake of his poor fellow-country-

men and relations. We are told by some old historians that, had Moses remained at the court of Pharaoh, he would in time have been made king of Egypt. Whether this be true or not, the sacrifice he made was just as great as if one of the chief noblemen of England were to leave his riches, his splendid houses and lands, and live with the poor people who have to work hard for their daily bread.

Other leading points in his character were hatred of anything like oppression and cruelty towards the poor and defenceless, a courageous pity which made him bold in taking the part of the weak, and a hastiness of temper which sometimes led him to act rashly. Thus, he found an Egyptian ill-using a Hebrew, and was so provoked that he smote and killed the Egyptian to deliver the Hebrew from his tormentor. But, in condemning this rash, and perhaps unnecessary, act, we must remember that Moses had not been trained as we have been, and possibly did not know as well as we do that it was wrong to kill the man.

At any rate the deed brought its own punishment. On another day he found a Hebrew ill-treating a fellow-Hebrew, and when he interfered he was asked whether he intended to kill one of them as he had killed the Egyptian. This question made Moses afraid, and he fled from Egypt into the land of Midian. The same hatred of oppression and sympathy for the weak appeared in him there. When he saw the daughters of the priest of Midian driven away from the well because they were weak women and unable to defend themselves, the unkindness and injustice at once roused him. He drove away the shepherds and watered the flock which the girls were tending. Such kindness from a stranger of another nation naturally led the young women to tell their father about it, and so became the means by which Moses found a home and a wife in his exile.

Once more let us note these two features in the character of Moses which we should all try to imitate.

1. He had no false pride; his high position had not made him careless of the sorrows and sufferings of those to whom he was related by blood.

2. He could not bear to see any persons wrongfully treated because they were weak. He did not wait to see which was the stronger side, but at once made the most of his strength on the side of the injured.

Occasions will very likely arise when we may be able to imitate the example of Moses in one, perhaps both of these ways. Let us try to imitate it honestly and manfully, and in so doing we shall be following the example of One greater than Moses, even of our Saviour Himself, who for the sake of mankind gave up far more than ever we can conceive, and who, although He was more full of

love than we can understand, was always moved to anger when He found strong men, and rich men, and learned men, acting and speaking with injustice and oppression towards the weak, the poor, and the ignorant.

LESSON 43.

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Read Exodus iii.

THIS chapter speaks of an event which was of great importance in the life of Moses and in the history of the Israelites. We have read how God told Moses that He had seen and pitied the sorrows endured by the children of Israel in Egypt, and how He commanded him to return there to be their leader out of slavery into a land of liberty. At first Moses was very loth to go. It is not at all probable that Moses had ceased to care for his fellow Israelites, but the work seemed too great for him. The Bible, in its truthful, unvarnished stories, tells of other men who were called by God to do some special work, and who at first were unwilling to go and do it. Some of these men had less excuse than Moses for their hesitation, but in all cases, that of Moses included, the hesitation showed insufficient trust in God. Before God gave this command to Moses, He reminded him that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is, the God who had promised that the descendants of Abraham should possess the land in which their great ancestor had been a stranger and in which he was buried. Then God showed Moses that the oppression which had displeased Moses was displeasing to Him also, and that He was about to end it. But after all that, when God said, 'I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt,' Moses answered, 'Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?' Then God promised Moses that He would be with him—that is to say, that He would give him strength and guidance. To encourage Moses still farther, and to assure the Israelites that Moses was really sent by God, God revealed to him His name. The words 'I AM THAT I AM' certainly mean more than the wisest man can completely understand; yet all of us can understand something about them. The Israelites, it seems, had sunk so low in their bondage in Egypt that they had forgotten all about God; but He had not forgotten them. To cheer the Israelites God spoke of His unchangeableness. He could not forget them, because He was always the same; only He could say 'I AM.' To cheer Moses, who once had failed to deliver his fellow-countrymen by his own power, God spoke of His power which is infinite.

The next chapter mentions some special and outward signs which God gave to Moses, giving him at the same time power to

repeat them when he came before Pharaoh. But even after all this encouragement Moses showed reluctance to obey the commands of God, pleading his slowness of speech; and, though God had promised to teach him what to say, still he tried to escape the performance of this duty, asking that any other person than himself might be sent to do it. Then God permitted Moses the assistance of his brother Aaron, who was a ready speaker. Having obtained permission from his father-in-law to return to Egypt, Moses set out. On his way he met Aaron, and when he had told Aaron all that he had seen and heard from God, they two went and declared among the Israelites the words which the Lord had spoken, and did before them the signs, and the people believed.

The 5th verse of chapter iii. illustrates a peculiar difference between Europeans and Orientals in expressing reverence. When we enter a church we always take off our hats, but in the East people to this day remove their shoes or sandals. A few years ago a gentleman who was travelling in the East narrowly escaped serious harm from inattention to this custom. He was in Cairo, walking along, admiring a great pile of buildings, when suddenly a crowd of people gathered round him, calling him infidel and threatening him with violence, because he had, without knowing it, passed the boundary of the Grand Mosque (a Mohammedan church or cathedral) without removing his boots.

LESSON 44.¹

Read Exodus v.

THE chapter describes a somewhat unexpected and yet very natural change in the conduct of the Israelites. Most probably, under similar circumstances, most of us would have acted in much the same way.

Moses, accompanied by his brother Aaron, had, as we learnt in the last lesson, called together his fellow-Israelites; he had told them all about the commands which God had given to him, and had showed them the signs which God had instructed him to show them. When they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped. But all the *work* was yet to do. The Israelites could not go away and leave the land of Egypt just as they liked, for they were slaves. The permission of the king, Pharaoh, had first to be obtained. Moses and Aaron were therefore obliged to go to Pharaoh to deliver God's message:

¹ N.B.—The teacher is advised to devote one lesson-time to the reading and study of the Scripture text of

this section, and another to the recapitulation of the story, with suitable practical lessons.

‘Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, let my people go.’ But Pharaoh said that he knew nothing about their God, and would not let the people go. Moses and Aaron repeated the request, but Pharaoh became angry, accused them of encouraging idleness among the people, and charged the taskmasters or overseers to give the people harder work to do. The Israelites were employed at that time in making bricks, but not as we make them in England. Our bricks are lumps of clay moulded into the proper shape and then baked to make them hard. The Egyptian bricks were made of the Nile mud, moulded, and dried in the sun: to prevent their falling to pieces, a quantity of chopped straw was mixed with the mud or clay; just as bricklayers in England mix cows’ hair with their mortar. Pharaoh ordered that no straw should be given to the Israelites, and yet that they should be required to make the same tale, or number, of bricks as when straw had been supplied. They had double work to do, and, failing to do it, were beaten severely. When they complained to Pharaoh that the short number of bricks was due to the fault of his own people in not giving them straw, he answered: ‘Ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord.’ Then the poor Israelites knew that Pharaoh was punishing them because Moses and Aaron had asked for their release. In the bitterness of their anger and disappointment they met Moses and Aaron, and charged them with being the cause of their added labours. ‘You told us,’ they seem to have said, ‘that you were sent by God to deliver us; but you have only made our trouble greater, we shall die, and it will be your fault.’ We cannot be much surprised that the poor people spoke so bitterly against two of their best friends, for they did not know any better. They seem to have expected all the promised good to come at once, and they had never learned patience.

In our own time, as all persons know who have had any experience of life, such conduct is not at all uncommon. A man promises certain good things to people, and they believe him: but when they find some trials and troubles to be endured before the good things can be enjoyed, they often turn upon their benefactors as deceivers, and say that they have done more harm than good.

Such conduct is, of course, very hard to bear, and so Moses found. He was generous and impetuous in disposition, and always eager to defend the oppressed; to such people ingratitude is the very hardest thing to bear. He could have borne Pharaoh’s opposition, for that was to be expected; but when those whom he was trying to benefit accused him of wronging them, his courage, it seems, broke down; he became impatient himself, and in this spirit addressed God. Moses himself had to learn the lesson which God was then teaching the people; namely, that God’s works are not uncertain because they are slow. Often and often do men expect a good work to

be finished very soon; and, because it is not so, they become impatient and think that God has forsaken them. But, if they will only wait God's own time, they, or, perhaps, their children or grandchildren, will find that God was directing the work all the while, and that the delay and waiting were appointed for a good and wise purpose. One of our wisest English authors, Bishop Butler, who lived in the last century, has some words on this matter. In one part of his great book called 'The Analogy of Religion,' which shows how God's works in nature are like His dealings with men, he speaks of the slow growth of trees and plants, and of the bodies of men and animals, and then he says: 'Men are impatient and for precipitating things; but the Author of Nature appears deliberate throughout His operations, accomplishing His designs by slow, successive steps.'

Let us learn, then, both from the Israelites and from Moses, not to be hasty and impatient, and, above all, not to distrust or doubt God's wisdom and goodness because we cannot see the end of all He designs for us; and let us remember that 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

LESSON 45.

Read Exodus vii.

THE latter part of this chapter records the first of those great and dreadful punishments which were sent by God upon the king and the people of Egypt for their cruel oppression of the children of Israel. These punishments we generally call 'The ten plagues of Egypt.' We need not now consider any moral lessons of the plagues; but only what they were, and how much the Egyptians must have been distressed by them, and in a later lesson we will study their full meaning, and the lessons we may learn from them.

Let us, however, first consider the earlier part of the chapter. After the great disappointment sustained by Moses and Aaron, they were commanded by God to go again to Pharaoh. Moses was to act as the chief of the two, but Aaron was, as we read, his prophet—that is to say, he was to speak for Moses, and to tell Pharaoh the words which God put into Moses's heart and mind. The two brothers obeyed God's command, and showed before Pharaoh some strange and wonderful signs. But still Pharaoh did not believe that they were messengers sent by God, and he refused to let the people go.

I. Then came a great punishment in the *turning of the water of the river into blood*. If we recall to mind our former lesson about the River Nile we must know that it was and is the source

of all the fertility of the land of Egypt, and that it is therefore most important to all the people of that land.

The water of the River Nile is not only very good for agricultural purposes, but it is also very delicious to drink. Indeed, as all the people in Egypt are gathered in cities, towns, and villages near the Nile, or near the canals which branch off from the Nile, they have scarcely any other water-supply. Near the city of Cairo there are some wells, but the water there has a very unpleasant taste, being what is called brackish, or flavoured with salts which have become dissolved in it as it trickles slowly through the soil. Well-water like this, of course, makes the people think all the more of the beautiful fresh water of their great river. Travellers in Egypt tell us many curious proverbs which show how very highly the Egyptians value the Nile water. One, used among the Mohammedans, says that if Mohammed had ever tasted the Nile water he would have prayed that he might never die, but go on drinking it always.

Now there is every reason to believe that the people of Egypt always had as high an opinion of, and as great a liking for, the water of the Nile as they have now, and, what is more, they could get no other water for drinking or any other purposes. How dreadful, then, it must have been for all the people, when the beautiful fresh water was changed to blood! It was not only a change of colour, for we are told that 'the river stank, and the fish in the river died.' This added very much to the affliction, for the ancient, like the modern, Egyptians, depended in great measure upon the river for food as well as for drink, the fish there being excellent eating. For a whole week this plague lasted, and the suffering of the people must have been very great indeed. Nor were the sufferings of thirst and hunger all that they had to bear. The river was at ordinary times so useful to them that they called it a gift of the gods, and at last worshipped the river itself as a god. Some kinds of the fish also were considered sacred. Careful thought about all this will help us to understand that the Egyptians, finding their river turned to blood, and the sacred fish dying, must have believed that the god was angry with them, and so religious fear was added to bodily suffering.

The first plague, then, the turning of the water of the river into blood, was terrible to the Egyptians, for these reasons:—

1. Because the Nile water is so sweet and good for drinking, and the Nile fish so abundant and good for food.
2. Because there was in Egypt no other water-supply.
3. Because both the river and some kinds of the fish in it were believed to be sacred, and were objects of worship.

LESSON 46.

Read Exodus viii.

THIS chapter tells us about three other of the plagues of Egypt—the plague of frogs, the plague of lice, and the plague of flies.

None of these plagues produced impression enough upon Pharaoh's mind to induce him to allow the children of Israel to go away from Egypt. While he and his people were suffering from them he was ready enough to make promises, but when the suffering was past, the promises were not kept. In acting thus, Pharaoh resembled some of us: when trouble follows our wrong-doings we are quite ready to say that we will not do wrong any more; but when the trouble is over we too often forget it and our good resolutions as well. Such forgetfulness does not always bring upon us, as it did upon Pharaoh, worse punishments; still, it always injures us; for breaking many good resolutions makes it more and more difficult for us to keep any.

Now about the plagues.

II. *The Plague of Frogs.*—After the first great punishment spoken of in our last lesson, Moses and Aaron once more demanded from Pharaoh permission for the Israelites to go away. On his refusal they threatened him and his people with a plague of frogs. These animals are, and probably always were, very numerous in Egypt; but at the time about which we are reading they were so multiplied, and their habits were so changed, that they left the marshes where they generally lived, and came into the houses of rich and poor, covering all their furniture, and even filling the kneading-troughs in which the people made their bread. Their presence everywhere, and their continual croaking, must have been a great annoyance to the Egyptians; besides, the people of Lower Egypt, where these events took place, regarded frogs as sacred, and used to worship them. The plague was, therefore, like the first, a shock to their superstitious religion. Pharaoh humbled himself for a time, and entreated Moses to pray for the removal of the plague; but when, in answer to the prayer of Moses, the frogs died, he hardened his heart, and the next plague came upon him, this time without any warning.

III. *The Plague of Lice.*—The very name of these insects is so loathsome to us that we can quite understand the inconvenience and disgust of the Egyptians, when, so to speak, the dust started into life in the form of these unclean insects. Their sufferings were, if possible, increased by the extreme cleanliness to which they were accustomed. They were the most scrupulously clean people we read about. They bathed several times a day, and wore white

linen garments; their priests, or ministers of religion, were obliged by law to be exceedingly careful that no pollution came near them, and they were so careful that they even shaved off all their hair before entering the temples of their gods.

IV. *The Plague of Flies.*—We all know how annoying, in hot summers, flies and gnats are, even in England, and may judge, therefore, how distressing this plague must have been in a country like Egypt. Sometimes at the present day, flies and mosquitoes are so very plentiful that they make life almost insupportable. They fill, so travellers say, nose, mouth, ears, and eyes, and sometimes cause blindness. It is not certain what kind of flies these were in the Egyptian plague, whether ordinary flies, mosquitoes, or even beetles. But the severity of the plague probably lay in this, that they were winged creatures, which could go everywhere, and that they came in such swarms as to corrupt the land.

In the account of this plague there are two other points to be noticed briefly:—

1. The land of Goshen, where the Israelites still resided, was free from the swarms of flies, and thus Pharaoh and the Egyptians were taught that God's purpose was to punish them, and that His power could bless His own people by keeping the plague away from them.

2. Moses speaks of the bull or cow as the 'abomination of the Egyptians.' In using this expression he refers to the fact that the Egyptians regarded the bull as a very sacred animal, which they believed it a great wickedness to slay.

LESSON 47.

Read Exodus ix.

WE have now read the history of three more of the great plagues which were sent upon the Egyptians—the plague of murrain, the plague of boils and blains, and the plague of hail. Two of these, again, had a special terror for the people of Egypt. As we are studying the accounts of these plagues in order we will, therefore, now consider—

V. *The Plague of the Murrain of Cattle.*—The word 'murrain' means 'death,' and is used as the name of a disease which in a very short time destroys large numbers of cattle. Very young people will scarcely remember a visitation of this disease in England a few years ago, and therefore some remarks upon it may not be out of place here. Scarcely anybody was able to explain how this cattle disease began, or how it spread from place to place, but it was common all over the country. Some of the cheese-farms in Cheshire and of the grazing-farms in Lincolnshire

suffered most severely; it is said that in some cases 90 per cent., that is, 90 out of every 100, of the cows, bulls, and oxen, died. The loss was very great, and many farmers, prosperous enough before, were quite ruined. If England had been purely an agricultural country the loss would have been felt much more severely than it was felt; but manufactures, mines, and trade give us most of our wealth. In Egypt, agriculture has always been the chief employment; and so, although the people did not use the cattle for food as we do, the loss was all the greater. They used oxen very much as we now use horses, namely, for ploughing, for drawing carts, and so on. Again, these cattle, cows, oxen, bulls, were sacred animals, and the Egyptians learnt in terror that the gods they worshipped were powerless to secure them from harm.

Meanwhile, the punishment of the *Egyptians* was made more remarkable by the fact that the Israelites did not suffer at all from the plague.

VI. *The Plague of Boils and Blains*.—The plague of the murrain caused the Egyptians much actual loss of property. This, the sixth plague, came still more close to them, for it afflicted themselves. The word 'blain' is an old English word, meaning a blister. All are familiar with it as part of the word 'chilblain,' which means a blister or sore caused by the cold. People have tried to find out the exact nature of the disease which is meant, but their opinions differ so much that no definite description can be attempted here. What we know is that it must have caused much pain, it must have been loathsome and polluting as well as painful. Still, we cannot say that the disease was fatal; indeed, from what is said in verses 14—16, we should judge that it was not so. At all events, Pharaoh's will was not yet bent to act as he was bidden, and therefore, by the mouth of Moses and Aaron, God sent to tell him that other plagues even more dreadful were still to come.

VII. *The Plague of Hail*.—Even in England hail-storms are sometimes so violent and the hailstones so large that great damage is done to the growing crops. In other parts of the world we have been told of the hailstones weighing as much as four ounces, which certainly would do great damage both to men and beasts, and also to trees and other vegetation. In Egypt, hail-storms, and even storms of rain, were and are very uncommon, and the people would consequently be all the more alarmed.

Some of Pharaoh's herdsmen attended to the words of Moses, and removed their cattle from the fields into houses, but others took no notice of his advice, and suffered severely for their unbelief.

This plague seems to have been the first causing actual death of men on the spot (see verse 25), and the first likely to cause famine,

and therefore future death or distress; for the barley, which was one of the food-grains largely grown in Egypt, was in the ear, and was smitten. Flax also was a crop of considerable importance, for from it was made the fine linen, which was the usual dress of all the upper classes of the Egyptians.

That short paragraph which tells us that, though the barley and flax were destroyed by the hail, the wheat and the rye, or spelt, escaped unhurt, exactly agrees with what we find now in Egypt, where the barley-harvest and the flax-gathering are about six weeks earlier than the wheat and spelt harvests.

LESSON 48.

Read Exodus x.

WE now approach the end of the history of the plagues, two of which are recorded in the chapter just read:—

VIII. *The Plague of Locusts.*—The terrible nature of this plague and the dread with which the Egyptians regarded it, even before it came, are sufficiently proved by the long conversation between Moses and Aaron and Pharaoh which preceded it, and by the fact that at last Pharaoh's servants, the ministers and officers of his court, besought him to let the Israelites go, because Egypt was destroyed.

Locusts are like large grasshoppers, and, like grasshoppers, they can leap as well as fly. But when they fly from one place of feeding to another they go in large swarms like clouds, and in such countless multitudes that they quite darken the sky.

A very interesting account of a visit of a great swarm of locusts to the north of Palestine is given by Dr. Thomson in 'The Land and the Book.' What is told here must be considered as coming from that source. The young locusts are more injurious to all green things than the full-grown ones. When hatched from the eggs laid by the old ones they immediately begin to eat ravenously, moving always onwards as soon as they have eaten all the food they can find in a particular district. Dr. Thomson saw them in one place covering the ground completely, and found that nothing could keep them back. The swarms were four days in passing his house. Of the havoc that they make, he says: 'In their march they devour every green thing, and with wonderful expedition. A large vineyard and garden adjoining mine was green as a meadow in the morning, but long before night it was naked and bare as a newly-ploughed field or a dusty road.'

Now let us try to imagine what harm an untold host of these destructive creatures must have done in a highly fertile country

like Egypt, where the people depended so much upon the fruit of the ground. If we can only fancy this, we shall know that Pharaoh was not exaggerating at all when, in his partial repentance, he prayed that God would take away from him 'this death only.'

Pharaoh's repentance did not last very long. God sent a strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red Sea; and then once more Pharaoh refused to let the people go. So, and this time again, as in the case of the third plague, without any warning, another plague was sent.

IX. *The Plague of Darkness.*—It has already been remarked, in speaking about some of the previous plagues, that the religion of the Egyptians increased their suffering and dread, but in this plague nearly *all* their terror came from religious dread.

Among all their gods there was none of whom they thought with more reverence than Ra, the sun-god. The name Pharaoh, which was the common title of their kings, means the sun. The king was supposed to be a Child of the Sun, and therefore almost divine.

How dreadful it must have been, when, at a single movement of the arm of Moses, who was sent as a messenger from the God of Israel, darkness came over all the land! How mighty the Egyptians must have thought the God of Israel, when one word of His servant could keep their great god from showing himself! For three days the darkness, which is described as 'darkness which may be felt,' and as 'thick darkness,' was over all the land. None dared to go out or move from his place; they could not see each other or do anything.

At the end of the three days Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, promising first to let the people go, but making such conditions to his promise that the permission, if accepted, would have been useless. Moses would not agree to any conditions; they were to be allowed to go all together and with all their property. Pharaoh became violently angry, and threatened Moses and Aaron with death if ever they came to him again on such an errand. Moses replied that so it should be; Pharaoh should not see him again. But before he left he gave Pharaoh to understand that another, the last and greatest punishment, was in store for him and for his people, and that, in the fear and dread which that last plague would cause, the oppressors and their slaves would change places—instead of Moses and Aaron begging Pharaoh to let the children of Israel depart, Pharaoh and the Egyptians would earnestly beseech them to be gone.

LESSON 49.

Read Exodus xii. 21—42.

X. *The Death of the First-born.*—This last great punishment of the Egyptians needs no explanation. At all times and in all countries the feeling of love and affection between parents and children is the same; therefore we can understand at once why 'there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.' The guilty king and his people were involved in one common suffering, and all agreed to send out the children of Israel in haste. This seems a fit time for asking the meaning of all these plagues. Why were they sent? What lesson have they for people living in our own times?

One reason was, that the Egyptians were worshippers of what we call the powers of nature. They looked upon the sky, the sun, and their great river Nile, as gods. These punishments, which came upon them through the very powers which they dreaded and worshipped, seem to have been intended to teach them that the God whose name is I AM—that is, the Eternal God—is the Ruler of all nature, and can use the powers of nature to destroy those who disregard His will. For these Egyptians knew that they were doing wrong, as may be seen clearly from the confession which Pharaoh made to Moses: 'I and my people are wicked.'

Besides, we may see in these dreadful punishments or plagues a proof of God's anger against those who oppress and enslave their fellow-men. This lesson was not learnt all at once, even by the Israelites themselves. But, in reading the histories of many of those nations which have used their power to keep other nations in slavery, we may find accounts of heavy afflictions and calamities which overtook them. These calamities we shall understand much better if we bear in mind that the first great series of Divine punishments that we read of in the Bible was inflicted upon a nation of slave-holders, and that the result of those punishments was the liberation of the slaves.

Before noting some examples of national punishment teaching this very lesson we may remark the following points to justify our making this consideration of deliverance from slavery so important:—

1. In verses 20 and 42 of this chapter we find that the Israelites were told to keep a perpetual remembrance of their deliverance. Let us read one of those verses again. 'It is a night much to be observed unto the Lord, for bringing them out of the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.' As a,

matter of fact, it is observed to this day not only by the Jews, under the name of the Passover, but by Christians also, at the time of Good Friday and Easter.

2. At the very beginning of the Ten Commandments are the words: 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' These words, spoken at so solemn a time as the giving of the Law on Sinai, must surely mean that God is the God of liberty, and that He hates slavery and oppression.

Now let us turn to two instances of punishment falling upon slave-holders. The Romans, in their last and worst days, conquered some of the Teutonic tribes, members of that family of nations from which we and the Germans are descended. They did so only, as it seems, to increase the number of their slaves. From that time the Romans never prospered; their history for three or four centuries is a history of blood. At last Rome itself was taken and sacked by the nearest relations of those very tribes which they had enslaved.

Still more recently, we have had in the history of the United States of America a close parallel to the history we have been reading. Slavery was there ended by war, but at what a cost! It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there was not a family which did not mourn some dead son who had fallen in battle. Now we must not speak of this resemblance with any desire to blame the Americans. They, unhappily, inherited negro-slavery from the time when they were English colonists; and from the time of their separation from the mother country many Americans struggled hard to get rid of the curse. Reference is made to the case of America merely to show how invariably the enslaving of our fellow-men brings terrible evils upon the nation which does so. This comparison between the slaves in America and those in Egypt was suggested chiefly by the words of a most earnest and patriotic American poet, Mr. James Russell Lowell. About twenty years before the war he wrote these words, which proved to be all too true a prophecy:—

Out from the land of bondage 'tis decreed our slaves shall go,
And signs to us are offered, as erst to Pharaoh:
If we are blind, their exodus, like Israel's of yore,
Through a Red Sea is doomed to be, whose surges are of gore.

LESSON 50.

Read Exodus xii. 43—51; xiii. 17—22.

WE will now consider the circumstances of the exodus or departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and of the way in which that depar-

ture was brought about. For this purpose we must go back to the time when Moses last spoke to Pharaoh.

When he left the king he went to his own people, and commanded them to prepare to leave Egypt. Many of them were scattered through the cities of that land, and he seems to have collected them together in a city situated in that part of the country where they were settled by the Pharaoh who was kind to Joseph.

When they were thus collected together, he told them of the great punishment about to be sent upon the Egyptians, namely, that God was about to destroy the first-born of every family. The Israelites were to suffer no such destruction. But then, as a condition of their safety, they were to make a public acknowledgment that they were Israelites. Each family was commanded to choose a lamb without blemish, and to slay it for a solemn sacrificial feast. When they slew the lamb they were to sprinkle some of its blood upon the door-posts of their houses, and to remain indoors from the time of doing so until the morning. And the feast, the last meal they were to eat as slaves, was not to be a feast taken in quiet enjoyment; all about it was to be marked by haste. The bread which they were to eat should be, as bread made in haste must be, unleavened; and they themselves were to eat as they stood. Every man's long garments were to be girded up, so that their folds might not hinder him in walking; his shoes (or rather sandals) were to be tied on firmly, and his staff was to be held in his hand, so that he might be ready to start on the march as soon as the word of command was given. Thus the Israelites passed that memorable night, and these peculiar observances were ordered to be repeated year by year in the Passover Feast. Why was it called Passover? Because, while the Israelites were thus engaged, the Angel of the Lord, *passing over* their houses, which were marked each on the door-post with the blood of the sacrifice, destroyed all the first-born of Egypt. Before the day dawned, as it appears from the history, the Egyptians, smitten at last with a terror which they could not overcome, besought the Israelites to go away, and to go at once. Up to this time the Egyptians had wanted to keep the Israelites; now they thrust them out. But they did not send them away empty; all the Egyptians loaded their former slaves with presents of gold and jewels—perhaps, as many people think, in part payment for all the work they had got out of the Israelites for nothing.

From Rameses, the city in which the Israelites were then collected, there were two ways to the land of Canaan; one, by far the shorter of the two, near the Mediterranean shore, was that by which Jacob and his sons had come into Egypt; the other, called the way of the wilderness, led round the head of the Red Sea,

and through the mountainous district of Sinai. The way which God commanded them to take was the longer way, and we are told the reason why it was chosen. Had they gone the shorter way, a few days' journey would have brought them to the land of Canaan, and to that part of it which was inhabited by the most warlike people. They would therefore have had to fight at once, and God intended them first to be disciplined and brought into order. A horde of slaves, without any discipline, such as the Israelites then were, would soon have been quite destroyed by the hosts of the kings of the Philistines. The first station they reached after leaving Rameses was called Succoth—probably because, as the word Succoth implies, they made booths or huts of branches of trees, in which they slept; the next station was Etham; and the third day's journey brought them to the Red Sea. We are told that God showed them that He was really their Leader by giving them a pillar of cloud to go before them and lead them by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to give them light.

It must not be forgotten that the Israelites took with them something which must have been very precious to them, namely, the embalmed body of Joseph, which their forefathers had promised to bury in the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

LESSON 51.

Read Exodus xiv.

THIS chapter teaches us how the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh and the Egyptians was completed. This crossing of the Red Sea was always regarded by the Israelites of later times as the commencement of their national history. In fact, no other event is so often alluded to by those poets who wrote the songs and hymns which we call the Psalms. Again and again the Psalmists speak of the passing through the water, and of the great destruction of their enemies in the Red Sea.

A glance at the map will show that the northern part of the Red Sea is divided into two branches, the western of which is now called the Gulf of Suez. It was this branch, at some place not far from the modern town of Suez, that the Israelites crossed. The exact place is unknown; for these events took place so long ago, that all traces of the old names of towns, wells, etc., have been lost. The exact way in which the waters were divided is also unknown: but even if everything about those two points could be found out, we should be as far as ever from an explanation of the whole circumstances. The simple fact that God delivered His people at a moment when they seemed in danger of perishing

is nearly all we know. The two points to be specially considered now are these:—

1. Pharaoh's short-lived repentance. The death of the first-born, of his own family, and of every family in the land, alarmed and pained him. Then, as we know, he was anxious to get rid as soon as possible of the slaves for whose sake the punishments were sent upon him and his land. When he had had time to think over the matter, he began to be sorry that he had let them go away so easily. Just at that time he heard of their taking the road round the head of the Gulf of Suez, and thought that their position there would give him an opportunity to overtake and bring them back. He started therefore for that purpose with an army of considerable strength. The bands of the Israelites, with their women and children and cattle, would, of course, move much more slowly than an army, and were consequently overtaken, as Pharaoh expected, in the very place where their difficulties were greatest. Think carefully over this again. All the great punishments sent by God had not at all changed Pharaoh's heart. He was afraid for a time, but soon got over his fear, and resolved to continue, if he could, his oppressive conduct towards his slaves.

2. The very slight impression made by all these great deliverances and wonders upon the minds and hearts of the Israelites. When they first set out upon their journey they seem to have made no complaints, but as soon as they knew that Pharaoh was coming after them, and they were shut in between the mountains and the sea, they began to find fault with Moses for bringing them there. They again behaved exactly as they had done in Egypt when the first attempt of Moses to obtain their release from Pharaoh had led to an increase of their work. All that they had seen of God's power did not lead them to believe or hope that He would deliver them at this time; and, because deliverance seemed impossible, they grew angry with the man who had been doing all he could for them. We shall often read of similar conduct in the later history of the people of Israel, distrust and impatience having been among their most strongly marked or characteristic vices.

Their deliverance, and the ruin of their enemies, illustrates the good old proverb: 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.'

The appropriateness of the words used by the Israelites—'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt?' etc.—is dwelt upon by many writers. The cliffs which form the boundaries of the Nile valley are full of caverns made purposely for places of burial. Day by day, as they were at their work near the great cities, the Israelites must have seen these openings in the rock. The Egyptians, moreover, were, of all nations, the most scrupulous about the burial of the dead. Probably the Israelites had learnt from them

to regard with dread the very thought of having their dead bodies cast unburied along the sands.

LESSON 52.

The Wilderness Journey.

WHEN the people had crossed the Red Sea, and had seen the last of their old masters, the Egyptians, they sang a song of praise and thanksgiving to God for their deliverance. The song, written in the 15th chapter of Exodus, is extremely beautiful and interesting, though rather difficult for the young to understand.

The journey of the Israelites, up to the passage of the Red Sea, was performed in extreme haste; but afterwards, with no immediate danger of pursuit, they travelled more at leisure. Some of their encampments, indeed, seem to have lasted several days. This is just what might be expected, for certainly it would be impossible to make a large number of women and children journey on day after day without rest; besides, the flocks and herds must have had time to feed, otherwise they would have died. The country through which the Israelites had to travel is called the wilderness. We hear from modern travellers what it is like now; and probably it is not very much altered since the time when the Israelites passed through it. The word 'wilderness' generally makes us think about a wide, open, sandy space, without any trees or grass. Part of that notion of ours is quite correct in regard to the wilderness which the Israelites entered immediately after they had crossed the Red Sea. It really is, for some distance, almost level, and has scarcely any trees or grass, but it is not covered with smooth sand like most of the sandy beaches round our shore; lumps of rock, of all sizes, lie about; though, in the course of years, some of the largest have been removed in some places, and so a kind of road has been made, yet the loose matter makes foot-travelling very painful. This roughly-cleared road was probably in existence when the Israelites passed that way, for it was on the direct route to some copper and turquoise mines, which at a very early date were worked by the Egyptians. One of the recent expeditions to Sinai took this road, and travelled for a few days along the desert plain, not far from the shore of the Red Sea. One of the greatest troubles on the journey was want of shade. The burning sun shone very hot on the travellers' heads, and they were very glad indeed if, at their halting-place at mid-day, they could find a small bush under which they could just shelter their heads. Another great inconvenience was want of water. They passed some springs, but in many cases the water was so strongly flavoured by the salts of the earth that it was impossible to drink it. The-

salt flavour so affected the water that, instead of quenching, it increased thirst.

Now the Israelites on their journey suffered from this same want. A small number of travellers with a large caravan of camels, can, of course, make some provision by carrying water with them. But such a host as the nation of the Israelites, many of whom were travelling on foot, could not so supply themselves, and the contrast between Egypt, with its grand river of delicious water, and the wilderness, with its very few springs of water fit to drink, must have been very great. They felt this want of good, palatable water most keenly at a fountain of bitter water, and, murmuring because they had no water which they could use, they found fault with their leader. Moses prayed to God for help and direction, and was then instructed to cut down a certain tree, and throw it into the fountain. The effect of the juices of the tree upon the bitter water was to make it palatable.

A chemist who has examined some of the water from one of these salt springs, says that any plant whose juice contained a very little oxalic acid would produce this effect, by neutralising the salts.

A still greater want of the Israelites, however, was want of food. They had left Egypt in such haste that they had taken no sufficient supply of corn with them. When their stock of unleavened cakes was finished they felt the danger of perishing by hunger. This want also was supplied by God. What the food was which God gave to the Israelites is not known. The name they gave it was 'manna,' which means 'What is it?'—a proof that they themselves did not know what it was. All that we can say is that God, whose Providence had delivered His people from slavery, did not allow them to perish of starvation. Many allusions are made to the manna in later books of the Bible, and always with some declaration that it was in an especial way God's gift to the children of Israel. It came day by day, and was of so delicate a nature that it would not keep over to the second day, except, as we are told, in the special case of the Sabbath. The lesson taught here was dependence upon God; such dependence as our Saviour would teach us in telling us to pray thus: 'Give us *this day* our *daily* bread.'

LESSON 53.

Read Exodus xvii.

THIS chapter gives an account of another murmuring or rebellion of the people. There was no water for them to drink, and they did chide with Moses, saying to him: 'Give us water that we may drink.' Moses explained that he was unable of himself to do

anything to help them, and that their complaints against him were in truth complaints against God, by whose commandment he was leading them on the way that they were going.

We, of course, know that want of water in a place so hot as the wilderness in which they were then travelling must have been very distressing. Yet, at the same time, we cannot but own that their murmurings against Moses were very unreasonable. But, as we learn from many stories of history and travels, people who have never been trained to self-discipline are always unreasonable under difficulties; while those who have been used to command themselves can best bear both evil and good fortune. The Israelites, we must remember, had been slaves, up to within a few days of the events which we are reading about. They had been used, we may say, almost like beasts of burden. The existing Egyptian monuments show us many pictures of Egyptian slave-life. There we see immense numbers of men drawing along by ropes huge masses of rough or carved stone, and taskmasters standing by with whips, and in some cases lashing the bare backs of the slaves. Most likely the life of the Israelites had been something like this; and such a life would certainly teach them no self-control.

How the needs of the Israelites were for the time supplied is told in the verses about the middle of the chapter. The end of the chapter gives an account of the first battle the Israelites had to fight. It will be well now to know something more about the wilderness; for a person may ask, How came there to be any people in the wilderness for them to fight with? The fact is that all parts of the wilderness are not like that through which the Israelites travelled at first. Behind the hills, which stand at some distance from the sea-shore, and between which and the shore there is nothing but barren stone and sand, there are many very beautiful valleys, where there are springs of water, trees, and pasture for cattle. Many travellers in these regions say that nothing has surprised them so much as coming suddenly upon such places through an opening in the hills. At the present day, one seldom finds such a valley without an encampment of Bedaween Arabs. Their tents are pitched by the stream, and their flocks browse on the grass of the valley. Professor Palmer, of Cambridge, who has travelled through this wilderness more than once, tells us in his interesting book, 'The Desert of the Exodus,' that, just about the place which the Israelites must have reached, there is an opening in the hills which leads into one of the richest valleys in the whole Peninsula of Sinai. The Amalekites, then dwelling in the valley, would naturally dislike the intrusion of so great a multitude as the Israelites, with their flocks and herds. Hence, probably, resulted the battle recorded in this part of Exodus. There are, says

Professor Palmer, traces all through the Peninsula that it once contained more inhabitants than now; but they are traces of people who lived very much the same wandering life as the modern Bedaween.

We may therefore describe the wilderness or desert, through which the Israelites passed, as a district partly dry, sandy, and stony, and partly diversified in the more mountainous division, by fertile valleys; and we may add that it was not generally, if at all, settled, being thinly inhabited by wandering or nomadic tribes.

LESSON 54.

Read Exodus xviii.

THIS chapter is the most important of all that we have yet read in the book of Exodus.

It has been remarked in a previous lesson that, although the Israelites were delivered from the slavery of Egypt they could not so soon get free from some of its worst effects. They were without self-command; they observed no regular order or discipline; they had no fixed laws to obey. In every difficulty, whether small or great, their leader, Moses, had to decide what was to be done. This chapter describes a wise provision made for the establishment and maintenance of order, and for securing to each free man one of the great privileges of freedom, namely, justice.

The father-in-law of Moses, Jethro, was the priest and chief of a tribe whose habitation was in the wilderness in which the Israelites had begun to travel. When he heard of the approach of Moses and the people under his care, he came from his valley to meet them. On the day after their meeting, Jethro was surprised to find that from morning to evening Moses was occupied in deciding disputes of various kinds which arose between the people. Some of these appear to have been very trifling. The old man pointed out to Moses how injurious this was both to himself and the people; for it would wear out his strength, and would give the people no self-reliance. He therefore proposed that from the people themselves men should be chosen to have authority over their fellows, with power to decide questions of small importance; leaving all important questions, and especially all relating to religion, to be referred to Moses himself.

According to a well-arranged system the lowest magistrate (we will use the English name) was ruler over ten, over five such magistrates was one ruler over fifty, and so on, to rulers over hundreds and over thousands. The constitution suggested by Jethro was almost identical with that under which many Bedaween

tribes live now. A little consideration will show us some of its excellences.

The qualifications required in the judges were wisdom, piety, truthfulness, and purity of motive.

A wise and clever man is not exposed to the danger of making mistakes through want of power to understand the questions laid before him. A man who fears God is always more anxious to judge justly, because he will know that doing injustice is sin against God. A truthful man is one whom other men will trust. A man hating covetousness would resist one of the great temptations of judges in olden times. In those days a man who wanted a case decided in his favour would make a handsome present to the judge, who, if he were covetous, might decide, not according to right, but simply for the sake of gain. Wisdom, piety, truth, and purity of motive are still regarded as the highest qualifications of the judges of Christian lands. But even with these qualifications the judges of the Israelites were not to decide merely according to their own sense of fitness. All the people, the judges included, were to be taught the laws and ordinances, and the principles which should govern their action. So all arbitrary exercise of authority was excluded. In this way the Social Law of the Israelites began, and their life as a society or a nation was made possible; and here we shall find some important lessons for ourselves.

We are free, and have had all the privileges of freedom and justice for many years. How can we remain free? By obedience to the laws which rulers and people are alike bound to respect. Some people fancy that they can be more free if they disregard the laws, but that is a great mistake; law is intended quite as much to protect us from injustice as to compel us to act justly. Violation of a wise law, even if not immediately punished by authority, will sooner or later bring its punishment upon us. It is the more necessary for us to remember these very plain and simple truths, because we all have a share in the making of the laws. In our country we have to yield to no arbitrary power, but to one which gives us the reason for its action, and which we ourselves help, or should help, to strengthen.

Those who know the meaning of the words 'civil' and 'criminal' will understand that this lesson tells us only about the civil law of Israel. The disputes and differences between one man and another about money or flocks, or so forth, were to be settled by these judges. Offences and crimes, as we shall find afterwards, were dealt with in a very different way. In our newspapers we see in reports of assizes the two heads, 'Crown Court' and 'Civil Court;' the first is the court in which murderers, etc., are tried,

the second is like that of which our lesson treats, being the court where questions of property, etc., are decided.

LESSON 55.

Mount Sinai.

BEFORE taking another reading lesson in the Book of Exodus, we will consider briefly the geography of the central part of the peninsula of Sinai, because it is the place where the events occurred about which we shall next read. To make this account more clear, however, some slight sketch of the history must be continued here, even before our reading it in the Bible.

For some days—or, taking their long halts into account, for some weeks—the Israelites journeyed near the sea. After their victory over the Amalekites they went inland, through the valleys (or *wadys*, as they are now called) of the peninsula. After some time they formed an encampment, which seems to have been more permanent than many others, near a mountain which, in the Bible, is called Sinai. In a plain in front of this mountain all the people were gathered together to hear the words of the Law, which was given by God to Moses. Now these events occurred so long ago that the old names of the localities have been almost entirely forgotten. It is true that travellers who are familiar with both Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, and Arabic, the language of the Bedaween, who now dwell in the regions crossed by the Israelites, can sometimes recognise an old name, differently spelt and differently pronounced, in the name now given to the place by the Bedaween. Thus, 'Hudherah' is believed to be the same name as 'Hazereth.' But generally there is no such resemblance, and travellers have therefore to do their best to discover the old sites in other ways.

Now, how could they discover the mountain called Sinai? Most people who read the book of Exodus think at first that there must be somewhere in the wilderness of Sinai one mountain standing up alone, and so clearly distinguished from the rest that we should be able to identify it at once. That, however, is not the case at all. The peninsula, as may be seen from a map, is, to speak roughly, shaped like the letter A turned upside-down, V, the southern end of the peninsula being represented by the point of the letter. In the space represented by that between the cross-bar and the point of the letter there are several lofty mountains, some standing alone, others gathered in groups. Some travellers have considered one, and some another, of these to be the scene of the giving of the Law. One purpose of the last expedition to the peninsula was to determine, if possible, which mountain

was entitled to the character. It was found that the traditions of the Exodus which remain among the present inhabitants are so confused that very little, if any, dependence can be placed upon them; and so the question was left to the scientific men of the expedition, who were officers of the Royal Engineers. Now let us consider what they had to find. First, a single mountain or mountain mass, which could be marked off by a barrier to prevent the people from ascending it; next, a mountain having, on some part of it not too high above the valley, a projection of some sort on which a man might stand, and from which his voice might be heard by people in the valley below; next, a wide plain, in which the whole host might be gathered at once; lastly, a *fertile* wady or valley, within easy distance of the mountain, and affording convenience for a permanent encampment of the people. These conditions are satisfied by one, and only one, mountain in the peninsula, a mountain which from time immemorial has been known to the Arabs as 'Jebel Musa,' the 'Mountain of Moses.' The gentlemen of the expedition found this to be a mountain which could be completely isolated by very simple barriers across the flanking valleys, and which had a projection right over a plain, while beyond the projection, further up the mountain, were recesses in which a man might be, as Moses was, completely hidden from the view of the people in the valley. The plain in front of the mountain was very carefully measured, and a calculation made of the number of people who could be assembled there, and it was found that the whole host of the Israelites could have been collected there comfortably, while, from experiments made on the spot by the commanding officer of the expedition, it was proved that men standing at the most distant part of the plain could hear distinctly the words spoken by a man standing on the projecting bluff. Lastly, close by, in the directly adjoining valleys, are fertile spots, which are now, and always must have been, admirably adapted for pasturage.

The scenery of the mountain thus pointed out is said to be grand and awful. Its height is not very great, but the outlines of its granite crags and the absence of any kind of vegetation give it a grandeur all its own.

LESSON 56.¹

Read Exodus xx. 1-17.

THE arrangements made by Moses to secure justice for the people in disputes about doubtful rights and privileges taught us the great

¹ N.B.—The matter of this section, from its importance, may occupy the time allowed for several lessons.

lesson that liberty could not be perfect without reverence for justice and obedience to law.

In this chapter we have something still more important, namely, the laws, or the first principles of the laws, given by God Himself for the direction of every person's life.

The 20th chapter of Exodus gives us these laws in the form in which they were first given to the Israelites, but nothing whatever in them shows that they were meant for Israelites only. They describe the duties of all men to God and to each other; and, as such, they are binding upon all men who have any knowledge of them. In this way they have been received by Christians, and so they form the foundation of the laws of all Christian countries.

We generally call these Divine laws 'The Ten Commandments,' or 'The Decalogue.'¹ The latter name represents more accurately than the former the name which they had at first, namely, 'The Ten Words.' How they were spoken originally we cannot positively say; but it seems that, after they were communicated by God to Moses, Moses recited them to all the people from that bluff overhanging the plain described in the last lesson. They were afterwards written or engraved upon two tables or slabs of stone, which were for many years very carefully preserved by the people.

Some consideration of the form of the words and of their contents will be useful.

When any command is given to anyone—as, for example, by parents or teachers to a child—it must come in one or other of two forms; either, 'You *are* to do so-and-so,' or 'You *are not* to do so-and-so.' The first form is called a *positive* command, and the second a *negative* command. It will readily be understood that the same meaning may be expressed in both ways. Thus, 'Go to school' is positive, but it implies the negative command, 'Do not loiter on the way, or play truant.' And so such a command as 'Do not steal' implies the positive command, 'Be honest.' Of the Ten Commandments all but one are expressed in the negative form.

Now we will take these commandments one by one, and try to find out something of their meaning.

I. and II. The first and second commandments are very closely connected. The first forbids our honouring, loving, or fearing any person or thing as we should honour, love, and fear God; while the second is more particularly directed against all image-worship. In the second commandment we are urged to obedience by an appeal to the two motives which influence us all most strongly, namely, hope and fear. We are told that God visits or punishes sin, and rewards well-doing, even in the present world.

III. The third commandment forbids all profane and careless

¹ Derived from the Greek words, *deka* = ten, and *logos* = word.

speaking about God. Persons who swear falsely in a court of justice take God's name in vain, but they are not the only persons who do so. It is taking God's name in vain to take any oath unnecessarily, or to make fun of reading the Bible. But perhaps the worst and commonest form of all is saying our prayers in church or chapel, and using the name of God, while all the time we are thinking about something else. In short, this commandment forbids all irreverence and carelessness in dealing with holy things.

IV. The fourth commandment teaches us about the right use of our time. It not only tells us that we are to rest on one day of the week, but also, which is quite as important, that we are to work on the other six days. It forbids idleness on the one hand, and forgetfulness of God as our Creator on the other.

V. The fifth commandment teaches us to respect and obey our parents, and, of course, all who are put in the place of parents, as teachers, magistrates, Queen. Here, again, we have given us a reason or motive for obedience, which is quite in accordance with actual facts of life. No nation has ever lasted long in which the duty of obedience to parents has been generally neglected.

VI. The sixth commandment forbids any act against the life of a fellow man; and as, according to an old maxim, 'the greater includes the less,' it forbids also any action which may tend to his personal injury.

VII. The seventh commandment forbids all deeds of impurity, whether affecting another person or ourselves.

VIII. The eighth commandment is very clear and precise. All dishonest gain, as well as violent robbery, is directly contrary to God's law. Respect for our neighbours' rights of property is the lesson here taught us.

IX. The three previous commandments forbid all injury to our fellow-men by any deed of ours; the ninth goes still further, and teaches us that we are not to injure them by false or malicious words. This commandment is one which we too often forget; but forgetfulness does not make our disobedience at all less wrong.

X. The tenth and last commandment sums up all the four which precede it, and extends them from that which other people can know about us to that which only we ourselves can know. If by word or deed we wrong another, somebody is sure to know it; but if we merely wish to do them wrong, the wish seems to be known only to ourselves. However, when we find the words 'Thou shalt not covet' given to us as one of God's commandments, we may learn, and ought to learn, that He knows our thoughts and desires, and that evil thoughts are displeasing to Him. It has been impressed upon us several times in the course of these lessons that the commencement of all deeds, whether good or bad, is a thought or

wish. If, then, we desire to keep God's commandments we must learn, and ask Him to help us, to govern our wishes and thoughts, or, in the words of the beautiful proverb already quoted, to 'keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life.'

The Ten Commandments are often divided into two parts, called, from the slabs of stone on which they were first written, the *Two Tables*. The first table, which contains Commandments I., II., III., IV., is said to teach us our duty towards God; the second table, containing V., VI., VII., VIII., IX., X., is said to teach us our duty towards our neighbour. The passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, quoted in one of our introductory lessons, is a summary of these two tables. Thus:—

Our duty towards God (Com. I.—IV.).—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.'

Our duty towards our neighbour, i.e., *towards our fellow-man* (Com. V.—X.).—'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

LESSON 57.

The Ceremonial Law.

BESIDES the Moral Law contained in the Ten Words, or Ten Commandments, spoken of in our last lesson, many other laws were at different times given to the people by the same authority. It would be a very long, and perhaps rather unsuitable, task to read through all the chapters of the Bible in which these laws are written. The present lesson, and a few which will follow it, will tell something about the chief principles of the ceremonial, the personal, and the sanitary laws which the Israelites were bidden to keep. We may certainly learn a great deal from such laws, but, in studying them, we must remember that they are very different from the laws in the Ten Commandments, which appeal now to our sense of right and wrong as much as they can have done to that of the Israelites. The other laws bear marks that they were only temporary, and, being temporary, have no binding force upon us Christians. Indeed, one of the earliest and hardest struggles that the first preachers of Christianity had to go through was that which ended in their freeing themselves and us from the burden of the ceremonial law of the Jewish nation. One of the Apostles calls that law a burden which neither those to whom he spoke nor their fathers were able to bear.

Yet we ought to know something of what it was.

I. *The Ceremonial Law*, or the Law which regulated the outward forms and observances of religion.

The first thing which we are obliged to notice in this cere-

monial law is the great number of sacrifices which by it were ordered to be offered. It would be out of place here to discuss the different opinions which have been held by different people as to the meaning and purpose of all these sacrifices. One thing, however, seems to be generally allowed, namely, that the offering of a sacrifice was believed to be a symbol of the union between the worshipper and God whom he worshipped; he gave an offering to show that he knew he ought to give up himself to God. It cannot be said that all those who offered sacrifices knew or thought of this; but this was the theory. Besides, the offering of a sacrifice was in some sense a confession of sin, either national or personal; that is, the person who offered acknowledged his own sin; or the priests, acting for the people, confessed the sins of the people; and in act, though not in words, asked for pardon.

For the sacrifices were of two kinds: those offered on behalf of the whole people, or those offered by a single man or woman for him or herself.

Chief among the national sacrifices was the daily morning and evening offering, called the whole burnt-offering. A sheep or a bullock was burnt whole upon the brazen altar in the court of the tabernacle,¹ and commands were given that the fire on that altar should be kept constantly burning. One such sacrifice was offered every morning and every evening, except on the Sabbath,¹ when two animals were sacrificed. On certain appointed days large numbers of sheep and bullocks were sacrificed in like manner. Offerings, which were known by distinct names, peace-offerings, sin-offerings, etc., some of which were of animals, others of flour, oil, and frankincense, were also appointed, and were continually offered.

Special personal offerings were ordained for certain occasions; for example, when a priest was consecrated, when a leper recovered from his disease, and, for women, whenever a baby was born.

A regular system of sacrifice was thus arranged; but very soon the people had lost all remembrance of its meaning. One of the earliest of the prophets, the prophet Samuel, told Saul, the first king of Israel, who thought that the offering of sacrifice was all that God required of him: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.' Such prophetic teachings—and there are many in the Bible—prove that the authority of the Moral Law was quite incalculably greater than that of the Ceremonial.

Such a system of sacrifices among a people like the Israelites, just coming out of slavery and barbarism, would have led to great confusion, unless some order for their offering had been arranged.

¹ A description of the Tabernacle and an account of the Sabbath law will be given in future lessons.

We find, therefore, that the ceremonial law commanded the setting apart of the members of a certain family, the family of Aaron, to act as priests, and, on behalf of the people, to offer these sacrifices to God. But there was a certain difference between the priests of the Israelites and those of many other nations, ancient and modern. Very often the priest, or minister of religion, claims to be above the ordinary law of the land; the priests of the Israelites were bound by the common law of the nation as much as any of their brethren.

The setting apart of one family to the priesthood happened so long ago that we should naturally expect to find no traces of it now. But we do find a curious trace. The Jews who are scattered through Europe are very careful to preserve the records of the families to which they belong, and one of the common names among the Jews is the name 'Cohen.' Now it is said that all people who bear that name are descended from Aaron, for the word 'Cohen' means 'priest.'

Among the priests there was one who was called the High Priest, who alone was qualified to perform certain duties, while the great bulk of the rest could be performed by any member of the priestly family. We shall the better understand the minuteness of the ceremonial law if we observe that the dress of all the priests was made according to a certain pattern, and that even so small a thing as the colour of the outer garment, or the width of the hem at the bottom of it, was regulated by ceremonial law.

LESSON 58.

Ceremonial—The Tabernacle.

OUR last lesson stated that the system of sacrifices would have been the cause of great disorder unless certain persons had been appointed to offer them. The same kind of argument shows that it was important that a certain place should be appointed in which the priests should perform their duties. We must not suppose that either of these appointments, of a sacred place or of a sacred order, would be necessary under all circumstances. The Jews, however, were then, and for many long years after, so unable to understand spiritual truths, that they would very probably have forgotten all about the union of their nation with God, who had delivered and made them a nation, if they had had nothing which they could see to remind them of that great truth.

The name given to the sacred place which, by God's direction, Moses constructed, is enough, if properly considered, to teach us what sort of place it was. The name *Tabernacle*, which is generally used in our Bibles, is so strange to us that we might think it

must have belonged to a strange building. But we have a familiar word, which expresses exactly the same thing; that word is *tent*.

That it must have been something of the kind is at once plain when we remember that the Tabernacle was made during the journey of the Israelites, and that it was to be carried with them from place to place. It could not, therefore, have been a solid building like one of our churches or chapels; and this belief is confirmed when we read David's description of the Tabernacle; he calls it a 'tent with curtains.'

Now, although the Tabernacle was made upon the same principle as the tents in which the Israelites lived, there were some differences between it and their ordinary tents.

It was erected to be the visible centre of the religious life of the people; and they, under the direction of Moses, showed exactly the same kind of feeling as nearly all people have shown since, and do show now. It did not seem right that the place which was set apart for the worship of God should be mean or shabby, if they had the power to make it beautiful and glorious. So they willingly gave all they had to give of gold and silver and brass, and also of fine linen. (The Egyptians, we may remember, were celebrated for the fineness and beauty of the linen they made. A great quantity of that linen would probably be among the presents which the Israelites received from their old masters when they were leaving Egypt.) These materials, freely given, and in great abundance, would be sufficient to make a distinction between the Sacred Tent and the common tents of black goats'-hair which the people lived in. Then the Tabernacle, although easily removed, was a larger building than the tents, and therefore had to be built more substantially. Its sides, covered by curtains, both outside and inside, were made of planks of acacia wood, jointed together by tenons and mortices; and the posts which supported the ridge of the tent, instead of being mere rough pieces of wood, were carved into the form of pillars. The roof was covered with skins of seals, obtained, it is believed, from the Red Sea.

This tent was 30 cubits long and 10 wide; that is, in English measures, 45 feet by 15 feet, and was divided by richly-embroidered curtains into three parts, in the innermost of which was placed an ark or chest, called the Ark of the Covenant, containing two tables of stone—granite slabs from Sinai—on which the Ten Words of the Law—called sometimes the Covenant—were engraved. Round the tent, at some distance from it, was a row of posts, with canvas curtains, enclosing a space which would measure 150 feet by 75 feet. This court or enclosure and the tent took the same general direction; the length was from east to west, and the Tabernacle was in the western half.

In the eastern half of the enclosure were placed the altar, upon which the sacrifices were offered, and a laver, or basin, full of water, in which the priests washed themselves at the appointed times.

This bare description may not, perhaps, give a very clear idea of what the Tabernacle looked like, but will show that there must have been a great deal of work to do to finish it. This is, perhaps, the most interesting part of the history of the building. Moses received from all the people gifts of all kinds of valuable materials for the building. He also called upon all of them who were wise-hearted and willing to help, to give their labour. So many were willing and able to assist that the labour did not fall very heavily upon any of them. The greater number of the workmen may, of course, have found rough work to do; the acacia-trees had to be cut down, and planks hewn out of them; the skins to be tanned, or in some other way prepared to resist wet; and other work to be done which did not require much skill. Then the women, of course, could do the needlework; sewing together the skins and embroidering the curtains kept many of them employed. There were, however, two men more skilful than the rest, whose names are told us: they were Bezaleel and Aholiab, and they appear to have done the metal work and the carving.

Altogether, we shall not find many passages of the history pleasanter to think about than this. The people seem to have been contented and industrious, which they were not very often; and it may be that this was because they were not working for themselves, but for the honour of God. They were very ignorant, and often, before and after this time, very rebellious; but now what they could do they did, and did willingly and well.

LESSON 59.

The Sabbath and Feasts.

ONE part of the Ceremonial Law which differs very much from the rest was the law of the observance of the Sabbath. The word Sabbath means rest, and is first used in the Bible at the end of the first account of the Creation (Genesis ii. 1-3) to describe the rest of God after the work of Creation. We are there told that God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it (or made it holy). When the Law was given to Moses the ordinance of the Sabbath was not put in the same list with other matters of ceremony, but was the subject of one of the Ten Commandments (the Fourth), which begins with the word 'Remember,' a sort of proof that the Israelites already knew something about it. There are in the Bible two copies of the Ten Commandments, one in the Book of Exodus, the other in the Book of Deuteronomy. The two copies

generally agree, but in the reasons that are given for the keeping of the seventh day as a day of rest there are some remarkable differences. By taking the two together we shall the better understand the meaning of the ordinance.

In Exodus the reason is given in these words: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.'

In Deuteronomy the reason is given thus: 'Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.'

The two reasons thus given are by no means contradictory to each other; but the latter is certainly the easier to understand. The first teaches us that we must work as God worked, and rest as He rested; and why? Because, as we are told constantly in the Bible, God made man in His own image. We shall refer to this, which we may call the natural reason, again, and may now turn to the second statement. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, and had had no time that they could call their own: God Himself delivered them from slavery and made them free; and that they might never forget the deliverance He commanded them to observe the weekly holyday as a feast of thanksgiving for their freedom. But, then, we Christians still observe a weekly day of rest—not, it is true, the seventh day of the week, but the first day. Can we say that the reasons why we observe Sunday as a holyday are the same as those for which the ancient Israelites kept the Sabbath? Perhaps not exactly; and yet those old reasons should have some weight with us. If for six days we have to work hard, as most of us have, to gain our daily bread, we leave ourselves little time to think that we have a higher life than that of the body. Our Sunday, then, may well remind us that we have a life higher than the animal life, that we are made in the image of God. And as to the second reason, unless we believe that it was altogether our own or our ancestors' wisdom and goodness that gained us English people our freedom, we surely should be very ungrateful if we did not wish to thank God for our freedom on the day when we most fully enjoy it. Yet the words of the commandment, in which 'rest' is so often repeated, will give us, perhaps, the best reason for keeping the Sabbath. We shall find that in after times the rulers of the Jews made all kinds of vexatious and even absurd regulations about the observance of the Sabbath, really turning its rest into toil; but from the beginning it was true, as our Saviour told the Jews of His time, that the Sabbath was made for man, and not

man for the Sabbath. We are taught to rest because rest is good for us, good for our bodies and also for our souls. Six days' work will weary and exhaust the bodily strength of most men, and the Sunday rest makes them all the fitter for work when Monday morning comes. Besides, the busy working day is not a time when we are likely to think much about our spiritual life: the work is needed if we would get the meat that perisheth; on the day of rest we may labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.

There is a very interesting passage teaching a great deal about the present use and obligation of the day of rest in a letter written by the great German statesman and philosopher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who died in 1835:—

'The choice of one day in seven is certainly the wisest that could have been made. However arbitrary it may appear, and may be to a certain extent, to shorten or lengthen work on account of one day, I am nevertheless persuaded that six days are the exact measure of man's physical powers of endurance, whether in labour or uniform employment. There is something humane, too, in allowing the animals employed in man's service to share in his rest. To lengthen the time between this constantly-recurring day of rest would be no less foolish than inhuman, though I once saw the experiment made. When I spent some years in Paris during the time of the Revolution (1792-1805) I witnessed there the abolition of this Divine ordinance, in order to establish in its room the dull, dry, decimal system. The tenth day was to be what our Sunday is, and the work went on for nine days consecutively; but when this became evidently too much for the strength many observed Sunday also, at least as far as the police would allow; hence resulted next too much idleness; and thus we always blunder between two extremes when we depart from the regular middle way ordained for us. But if this be the case when merely worldly considerations are taken into account, how much is its importance altered when seen in a religious point of view, which makes the idea as well as the enjoyment of the day a source of spiritual peace and real consolation!'

The appointed feast-days, when the Jews were commanded to meet together in the place which God should choose, are in one sense like the Sabbath. They were very evidently appointed for the remembrance of God's goodness and for the benefit of the people; for their wholesome, rational, social enjoyment. In another sense they are unlike, inasmuch as their special meaning and obligation were for the Israelites only. But from their appointment we may learn a very important lesson, that if we make religion a thing entirely without enjoyment we are going

directly against all that we can learn from the Old Testament of God's designs for us.

LESSON 60.

Natural Law and Mosaic Law.

WE often speak of certain laws which we call the 'Laws of Nature.' These laws are expressions of facts about all the external things which men have observed. It is found, for example, that if you take a stone to the top of a house and let it go, it will fall to the ground; it is found that certain defects in drainage and cultivation always cause deficiency in the crops raised; that certain diseases are the result of certain conditions which may sometimes be altered, and so on. All these facts are called Laws of Nature, or Natural Laws. Sometimes they seem to tell us what we should do, at other times to tell us what we should avoid, but in either case they are worth attending to. One part of our duty in this world, as the Bible teaches us, is to 'replenish the earth and subdue it.' This we can only do by understanding the method, or law, which directs natural processes, such as life, growth, decay, etc. We can only conquer Nature, as the great Lord Bacon has said very wisely, by obeying Nature.

The object of this lesson is to show by a few examples how the laws written down by Moses for the guidance of the Children of Israel agree with some of the laws of nature which men have discovered. Quite at the beginning of this series of lessons it was remarked that we were to learn from the early chapters of Genesis that God not only made all that we see but also made laws for the government of all visible things. A law of nature, when we find it out, is therefore to be treated with reverence, for it teaches us with certainty something of God's design. We should expect, therefore, to find that when commandments were given by Moses, who received them from God, about natural things, they would agree with what we can find out about those natural things by the use of our faculties of observation and comparison. This agreement is just what we do find. It would be impossible to give proof of this statement in every particular, but some instances are set down to suggest the method of examination which may be found profitable in other cases hereafter.

1. We have recently had what may very well be called an example. Men's bodies are so constituted that they cannot bear more than a certain amount of continuous work. It is then a law of nature that a man shall rest at certain times if he is to do the greatest amount of work. Agreeing with this natural law is the law of the Sabbath.

2. Certain diseases, common among ourselves, and others much:

more common and more terrible in the East, are what is called contagious, that is to say, one person can take them from another by touch. This is a natural law, and the conduct it suggests is separation of the diseased from the healthy. This conduct was what Moses ordered by law.

3. It has been proved by experiment that certain kinds of meat are unhealthy, especially if eaten in warm countries. Most of these unhealthy meats are included in the list called in the Law 'unclean meats.'

4. Perhaps the best illustration of what is meant may be found in the laws which regulated the agriculture of the Jews.

Farmers have found out that they lose very considerably by trying to grow the same crop in the same fields year after year. If they change the crops, however, and grow sometimes wheat, sometimes clover, sometimes turnips, they find that the land yields a much better return for the labour bestowed upon it. Before this principle of change, commonly called the 'rotation of crops,' had been discovered and acted upon, it was known that part of the same result was attained by letting the fields lie fallow, that is untilled, at certain intervals. The partly-exhausted soil seemed by rest to recover its fertility. Now, of course, it was no part of the intention of the Law given by Moses to teach scientific agriculture, or, indeed, to anticipate any scientific discovery. Still, it is remarkable that among the laws given by Moses is a command that every seventh year the land should be allowed to remain at rest, that no ploughing or sowing should be done.

In illustration of this whole subject, and as showing how much harm has been done by man's neglect of natural laws, the following facts have been collected from various sources, especially from a work entitled 'Man and Nature' by Dr. G. P. Marsh. The general lesson conveyed by them is stated forcibly by the late Canon Kingsley:—

'Man's work is too often the curse of the very planet which he misuses. None should know that better than the botanist, who sees whole regions desolate and given up to sterility and literal thorns and thistles, on account of man's sin and folly, ignorance and greedy waste.'

The accounts which ancient historians and geographers have given of the provinces which formed the Roman Empire show that about the Christian era the greater part of that Empire was in every respect fitted for the maintenance of a large population. Now, Dr. Marsh says, 'more than one half of the whole extent is either deserted by civilised man and surrendered to hopeless desolation, or at least greatly reduced in both productiveness and population. Vast forests have disappeared from mountain spurs

and ridges; the vegetable earth accumulated beneath the trees by the decay of leaves and fallen trunks, the soil of the Alpine pastures that skirted and indented the woods, and the mould of the upland fields, are washed away; meadows, once fertilised by irrigation, are waste and unproductive, because the cisterns and reservoirs that supplied the ancient canals are broken, or the springs that fed them dried up.' The provinces thus desolate are enumerated by Dr. Marsh as follows: 'Northern Africa, the greater Arabian peninsula, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and many other provinces of Asia Minor, Greece, Sicily, and parts of even Italy and Spain.' And the cause, briefly stated, is the same, namely, the endeavour to obtain from the soil greater and more frequently-repeated crops than according to natural law it could supply. The destruction of forests is specially noticed in the passage quoted; this alone has, even within the memory of living men, greatly altered for the worse the climate of North Italy, and devastated many Alpine valleys, which fifty years ago were full of fertile fields. The result of human action not in harmony with natural laws is felt not only in long-settled countries such as those referred to above, but also in new countries. It is not more than three centuries ago that the cultivation of the naturally fertile land near the Atlantic shores of America was commenced. Already, owing to the constant raising of crops without rest or rotation, or returning to the soil as manure an equivalent for those materials which the crops take away from it, the fertility of those regions is almost gone; year by year land is left out of cultivation because it will not pay its expenses, and new land is tilled further west.

LESSON 61.

Laws about Persons.

BEFORE we return to the history of the travels of the Children of Israel we must have one more lesson on the Law. The part of the Law which we are now about to consider is that which regulated the conduct of the Israelites towards each other, and in some cases towards strangers—that is, persons belonging to other nations.

At the time when the Law was given to the Israelites they were by no means a civilised people. In many respects they were barbarians, and, like most barbarians, were very much inclined to be cruel and revengeful. A great deal of the work that they had to do before they could settle down in peace in the land which had been promised to them as a home was harsh and cruel work, and was likely to increase these vicious inclinations of theirs. It is therefore a satisfaction to us to find that there were many commandments of the law which were specially intended to teach

them a better lesson, to make them gentle and humane instead of savage and cruel. A few of these humane laws will form the subject of the present lesson.

1. Among many wandering Eastern tribes to this very day it is held to be a duty binding upon a brother or a son, or, indeed, any very near relation, to take up the quarrel of a brother or father. Especially, if a man is killed, even by accident, his nearest male relative is called the blood-avenger, and pursues the killer until he overtakes and slays him. Then the friends of the last slain become avengers, and so on, a quarrel thus begun lasting sometimes for many generations. The Jews were actuated by feelings like those just described; but the Law limited the revenge, so that quarrels should not be perpetual. The rude law of the desert was to be changed when the people should come to their home in Canaan. Certain cities of refuge were to be set apart, that the manslayer might flee to them and be safe for a time. But this regulation was made: no man who had availed himself of the privilege of sanctuary was considered free of the guilt of blood until the circumstances of the death had been considered by judges appointed for that purpose. If then it was proved that the death was wilfully caused, he who had committed the murder was publicly executed; if it was proved that the death was caused by accident, or without malice, the accused person was cleared of the charge, and the avenger had no power to injure him. This legislation was not very perfect, but it was a great deal better than allowing any man to be judge and executioner at once, and by delaying the decision it must often have given time for violent passions to cool down.

2. The instance just given shows rather how law was brought in to lessen a kind of natural ferocity than how it taught positive humanity. Now, therefore, it seems right to give an example or two of the latter and better kind.

However simple any state of society may be, there will always be found in it some differences of wealth and power. The more powerful and wealthy are always tempted to use their power and wealth for the oppression of the poor and weak. Moses was instructed to teach the people that, since they were all brethren, it was a sin in the sight of God to take any such advantage. The special laws made to enforce this truth are very numerous; two, however, may be selected as the most interesting.

Suppose a poor man wants money for some purpose, and asks a rich man to lend it to him, how can the rich man have any security that he will get his money back? By receiving something that the poor man does possess, and keeping it until the money is repaid. The principle is something like that which is adopted now in large towns, and called pawnbroking. Of course

it is often a great gain to the poor to have the worth in money of something which for a time they do not want to use. But there is some danger lest something really necessary to the poor man's life or comfort should be taken as a pledge. The danger was met by the Law of Moses in this way: the rich were advised to give liberally to the poor (it is quite plain that it would have been beyond the power of law to compel *any* rich man to *give* to *any* poor man); but if he would not give, but only lend, then he was absolutely forbidden to take as a pledge either the bed, or the clothes, or the millstone (for every family in those days ground their own corn into flour) of the poor.

The other special law relates to the harvest. The rich farmers were absolutely forbidden to rake up the scattered ears of corn which fell to the ground during the reaping, or to go again over the olive trees to gather every olive that might have been left behind in the first picking. The gleanings of both corn-fields and olive-gardens were to be left for the poor:—‘the widow and the fatherless and the stranger’ are mentioned as the persons who should be allowed to glean.

The words of these commandments are very simple and beautiful. The Israelites were taught that God cares for the stranger, and that, therefore, they should care for him too; and were reminded that they once were strangers in a land which was not theirs. The memory of their own past sorrows was to teach them love and kindness.

3. Animals useful to man were not forgotten by the Law. Our good English laws punish people who ill-treat horses or donkeys or cows, or any dumb animals. The first law of that kind may be found in the Bible, and is very interesting: ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.’ Threshing the corn was then not done by machinery, but by driving oxen over the bundles of ripe corn laid on what was called the threshing-floor. The object of the law was to allow the oxen who were employed in this work to enjoy some of the results of their work by eating some of the corn which they were separating from the chaff and straw.

All these laws are very simple, and suit a rather rude state of society; but the effect of them all one by one, and still more when they are taken together with very many of the same kind which we have been obliged to pass over in silence, must have been to create and gradually to cultivate and encourage kindness of heart in the people who had to obey them. Teaching such as this may fairly be considered a preparation for the teaching of Christ—‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.’

4. Lastly, the Mosaic Law enjoined in the strongest manner

purity in thought and deed in all the relations between the sexes. In no respect is the Divine inspiration of the Mosaic Law more clearly seen than in the stress which the Law lays on purity of mind and conduct, for in no respect does it rise more entirely above the abominable notions and customs which prevailed among the heathen nations.

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LESSON 62.

Read Exodus xxxii. to verse 24.

Now we come back to the history, which our lessons about the laws given to the Israelites will help us to understand better than we could have done otherwise. The piece of history which has just been read is very sad, whether we consider it as a part of the history of the Israelites, or as a part of the history of the life of Moses. It is so for the following reasons :—

1. We find how little trust the Israelites had, either in God, who had delivered them from Egypt and was leading them through the wilderness, or in Moses, who was God's prophet. Moses was directed by God to go up into the mountain, away from that part where he could be seen and heard by the people, into the sheltered valley between that promontory and the summit of the hill. There he remained for forty days, or nearly six weeks, receiving from God instruction of the greatest importance to all the people. At length, the people, who, as we have already learnt, had very little faith in anything or any person that they could not see, thought that Moses was lost. They applied to his brother Aaron, whom they seem to have believed to some extent jealous of the greater authority of Moses, and asked him to make them gods. He, although he had heard with them the command to make no graven image, told them to bring to him their ornaments of gold. These he took and cast into the form of a calf, which the people wickedly and foolishly declared to be the god which had brought them out of Egypt. The truth was that both Aaron and the people were thinking of and half-believing in the image-gods of Egypt. One of the chief Egyptian deities, named Apis, had always been represented in the form of a calf. It does not need much thought to discover how foolish it was to say that it was an Egyptian god that had defeated the Egyptians and delivered them, who had long been very useful and hardworked slaves of the Egyptians. When the image of the calf had been made and set up in the camp, the people, led by Aaron, worshipped it with unseemly and riotous feasting.

We must break the connection of the history a little, and mention here, with disgust, the excuse that Aaron afterwards made for himself. He said that the gold he had melted 'came out (of the fire) this calf.' As if the form of a calf could *make itself* in the

fire. With such people as the Israelites and such a brother as Aaron to deal with, it cannot much be wondered at that Moses became very impatient and angry.

2. But in the conduct of Moses, great and good man as he was, we find on this occasion the breaking out of an old evil, which had before now done him great harm. His great failing—and his failings are told us so plainly in the Bible that it would be foolish in us to forget them, and quite wrong to suppose that he had none—his great failing was hastiness of temper or impatience; it was generally impatience of wrong, but at the same time it was not harmless in Moses or without harm to him. It seems that the golden calf had only just been made, and that the people were in the midst of their unholy feasting, when Moses, coming down from the mountain, caught sight of what they were doing. He had the two tables of the Law, the written or engraved copies of the words which had been spoken to the people, in his hands, and he cast them down in his anger so violently as to break them to pieces. He forgot, we may suppose, how little opportunity after all there had been for a people so little disciplined and so badly instructed to know any better, and forgot, also, that the laws, of which he broke the copies, were intended first of all, to make them better. His anger prevented these thoughts, and we cannot doubt that his anger was injurious to him. But it would not be fair not also to call attention to those parts of the passage we have just read which set forth the nobler side of the character of this great man. One word is used in the Bible, and often quoted from the Bible, to describe him. 'The man Moses was very meek.' When we say a man is meek we mean that he never gets angry, and is always quiet and forbearing; but we are quite sure that Moses was not at all a quiet, peaceable man, and that he did very often get angry. So we try to find what the word really means which in our English Bible is translated meek. The best English translation is *self-forgetful*; and this history shows us how true a description that word gives of Moses. We have read a most solemn and perplexing conversation said to have passed between God Himself and Moses. We do not think that we can understand it all, but we can understand that although great personal power and authority was offered to Moses and to his descendants, he did not accept the offer. The cause why he did not accept it was his care for the nation, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of which he was one. His glory, if it came out of their shame, was a thing he did not and could not care for.

We find this sense of self-sacrifice expressed still more strongly in the history which immediately follows. When the sudden anger of Moses was past he prayed to God for forgiveness for the

people: 'Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.' He was taught that God's punishments do not come upon men capriciously: his desire to bear the punishment of the people was not a desire that could be granted, or that it would be right for God to grant. In the right time the punishment would come, but it would come, not upon Moses, but on those who had sinned. That upon Moses himself punishment did come, for his haste and impatience, is true, as we shall find out; but we shall also find that the punishment for this sin of distrust and idolatry came upon the people who had committed it and upon the priest who had helped them to its commission.

LESSON 63.

Read Numbers xi.

WE have passed over some interesting passages in the history of the journeys of the Israelites, and some others which show us a great deal of the character of Moses, but the omission has been unavoidable. The time which the whole course of lessons is intended to cover is too short to allow us to stop and consider everything. The chapter which we have now read describes a turning-point in the history. At the end of the lesson we will consider briefly what we learn in this chapter concerning Moses; but the main lesson is one drawn from the conduct of the Israelites.

In an earlier reading we came on the words 'the flesh-pots of Egypt;' although the words are not actually used here, yet we may clearly understand that it was still the flesh-pots of Egypt that the people were longing for. 'Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away.' These are the words set down as spoken by the people, and repeated in God's instruction to Moses with an addition—'Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt.'

We wonder how a people that had endured the hardships of slavery could so soon have forgotten these hardships, and how they could have desired even the best of food if the condition of their getting it was a return to slavery. The true answer to our wonder is the fact that they had been slaves. The Greek poet, Homer, speaks of slavery as 'taking half the man away.' The half which slavery takes away is the noblest half of the man. Even when slaves are kindly treated, the necessity of keeping them in a state of submission makes their masters discourage all training and all exercise of their nobler powers of reason and thought. In many cases, indeed, we may believe the hopelessness of escape from

slavery leads the slave to forget, or wish to forget, that he has a nobler part at all. He is, in his master's eyes, a living instrument or a chattel, and becomes at last little more than that in his own eyes. This, if we look at the matter rightly, is the greatest wrong of slavery. Cruelty, harshness, injustice of many kinds, a man can bear; but when he is looked upon, and learns to look upon himself, as a mere beast of burden, or a living tool for building or digging, the manliness soon dies. He has no hope of better things, no interest in the pursuits of other men, nothing to care for but his body, that he may keep it warm and well fed. This seems to have been the case of the Israelites. Excluded from all higher interests, and even forgetting that they were heirs of a great promise made by God, they occupied themselves only in sensual cares, and so unavoidably degraded themselves to such an extent, that even when freedom was given them they did not care for it, objecting that they were better fed when they were slaves. A lower degradation than this it is scarcely possible for a people to reach. We must bear these things in mind, not simply that we may understand why the Israelites so long ago behaved so foolishly as they did, but because there is a danger of the same kind of thing happening to us all. We are free-born, and ought to thank God that we are so. But unless we live like free men and women there is no reason why we should not become slaves. Not that it is likely that any of us will ever be bought and sold, but that we may have the worst part of slavery—its degradation. If we do not care for the improvement of our minds, and for instruction in that moral and religious knowledge which can make us good citizens, we shall surely care too much for the merely bodily pleasures of eating and drinking. Our tastes and desires will become so low that we shall lose the better half of manhood, and shall be the slaves of any man who may take the trouble to give us opportunities for the gratification of those tastes. We have the future very much in our own power. If we choose the higher and better aim of a good, noble, intelligent life, our country will become, even more truly than it is now, the home of the free; if we choose the worse and lower aim of a life of only bodily enjoyment, not only shall we be losers, but our country will be a greater loser still. The history of the past shows that a people in slavery generally become degraded and scarcely fit, for a long time, for anything but slavery; and that a people who, however free, become degraded in their habits and tastes, always end in becoming slaves.

Now for the promised word or two about Moses. This lesson shows us once more both sides of his character; it shows us his impatience and distrust, in the complaints which he makes to God, that he has to bear the burden of the people, and in his desire to

die and leave his work; but it shows us also his nobleness and self-forgetfulness, in his answer to Joshua, who was jealous of the honour of his master. Two men prophesied—that is, spoke truths taught them by God—in the camp, not in the place which had been set apart for religious purposes. Joshua wished Moses to rebuke them, but he said: ‘Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!’

LESSON 64.

Read Numbers xiii. 17—xiv. 10.

MANY of the passages of Scripture which we have been reading lately show us very clearly how hard-hearted and rebellious a people the Israelites were. The passage which we have read to-day proves this fact even more forcibly, for it shows us that there were in all the hosts of Israel only two whose trust in God, and confidence in Moses as God’s messenger, was unshaken. These two were Joshua and Caleb.

The people must have arrived, at the time about which we are now reading, near the southern borders of Palestine—that is, near the northern edge of the wilderness through which they had been travelling. The time seemed to be close at hand when they would have to enter upon the promised possession of Canaan. But none of them thought, and Moses thought least of all, that they would be able to enter upon that possession peaceably. The land was inhabited by men skilled in war, who would not give up their cities and fields and vineyards simply because they were told that the possession of them had been promised more than 400 years before to Abraham and his descendants. If the land of Canaan was to be possessed at all, it must first be conquered. It was therefore the duty of a wise leader to try to find out something of the people with whom he and his hosts would have to fight. Moses selected twelve men, one from each of the tribes, and sent them to spy out or examine the land. They were told to bring back a report of all they should see, and all they could find out; both about the land itself, its fertility, the crops that grew in it, the nature of the soil; and about the inhabitants and their manner of life.

They were absent forty days, and then returned to Kadesh, where the camp of the Israelites was pitched, bringing with them, as a proof of the fertility of Canaan, a bunch of grapes so large as to be carried on a staff between two of them. All the twelve agreed in saying that the accounts they had heard before about the country were quite true; it was indeed a land flowing with milk and honey. But when they came to speak of the people of Canaan they showed great difference of opinion. Ten of

the spies said that the men were men of great stature, and very strong, and that they lived in walled cities, and therefore were not to be conquered by a tribe of tent-dwellers like the Israelites. Two, however, while they allowed the truth of what their fellows had said about the strength of the cities and of the people, declared that, for all that, if the Israelites were ready to advance at once, they would be able to overcome the Anakim and the other tribes of Canaan. Then the ten repeated their account, as it seems, with some exaggerations, such as, that there were giants in the land, in whose sight they had been as grasshoppers, and whose bulk and strength made them think themselves very poor and weak. We have heard enough about the character of the Israelites to know which of these reports they would be more likely to listen to. They could not endure the notion of having any difficulties to contend with, and so resolved to abandon the enterprise. Among their weak and foolish words were heard wishes that they had died in Egypt, and complaints against God that He had brought them there to die by the sword. They would have nothing more to do with such a leader as Moses, but would choose a captain for themselves, and go back to Egypt. The two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, again addressed the people, first tearing their clothes, to show how grieved they were to hear such foolish and wicked words. They told the people that by obeying the word of God they would have a power on their side greater than all the might of the Canaanites. 'Fear them not,' they said, 'their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us.' But the people, with as little sense of what they were about to do as most mobs have, and, like most frightened mobs, quite ready to be cruel, would not at all hear the words of reason and argument. They said that they would stone the two men who opposed their plans.

This passage has been chosen for reading because it gives us an example of what we shall often find in history, perhaps in our own experience, namely, the courage of only one or two who know that they are right, and can give reasons for what they say in the presence of multitudes who think otherwise and who are guided by passion instead of reasoning. Very possibly we shall never be exposed to actual danger of death through saying what we believe to be true, but some time may come when we shall need all the moral courage we possess to defend ourselves against the outcries of some of our fellow-men who are only guided by their fears. At such a time it will strengthen us to think of Joshua and Caleb, and to remember how bravely they stood up against a whole nation; and to remember, also, that the result proved that they were right and the whole nation was wrong.

The next lesson will show the result of this rebellion.

LESSON 65.

The Appointment of the Wanderings.

IMMEDIATELY after the great rebellion of the Israelites, and their refusal to obey the commands of God, a great punishment was threatened, and its execution was begun at once. At first they were all in danger of perishing strangely and suddenly, but Moses interceded for them, and besought God to spare their lives and pardon their sin. The answer to his prayer was a promise that their sin should be forgiven, but at the same time he was told that they must bear the natural consequences of their cowardice and distrust. They were not to enter at once into the land which God had said He would give them, but were to wander about in the desert country until the whole number of those who were above the age of twenty years when they left Egypt had died. The only exceptions were to be the two faithful spies about whom we have read so lately, namely, Caleb and Joshua. The words in which Moses was told to announce this punishment to the people are as follows: 'Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. . . . And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.' (Numb. xiv. 29, 30, 33.)

A more immediate punishment fell upon the ten unfaithful spies, who, by their evil report of the land, had caused the rebellion of the people, for we are told that they 'died by the plague before the Lord.'

At last, when this dreadful message was delivered to them, the people discovered that they had been foolish as well as cowardly and rebellious. They mourned greatly when they heard that they were to wander in the wilderness for forty years, and resolved to try to change their fate. They said they would go up to the place which God had promised to give them, and would fight against the nations whom, only the day before, they had refused to attack. Moses told them that it was too late for them to make up their minds to do anything of the kind; they could not change God's purposes as often as they chose to change their own. He advised them not to attempt the attack upon the tribes of Canaan, because, without God's help, they would certainly be defeated. However, they showed now, in resolving to act, the same stubbornness which they had shown before in resolving not to act; they would

not take the advice of Moses, but went out into the hilly country inhabited by the Amalekites and the Canaanites, under a leader of their own choosing. The natural consequences of such rashness overtook them; they were altogether defeated by their enemies, and many of them were slain. Then their wanderings began.

The wanderings of the people will be the subject of a future lesson, but now there are two things for us to think about.

1. Although the punishment which was inflicted upon the rebellious people was very severe, yet there was mercy in it. Nearly always we can find some benefit arising out of events which seem at first very dreadful. The words of the great English poet, Shakespeare—'Sweet are the uses of adversity'—are illustrated by this history. A number of people so cowardly and yet so very obstinate as the Israelites were, could not have conquered the land of Canaan; they would almost certainly have been destroyed as soon as they came into contact with the warlike inhabitants of Canaan. The vices which were most marked in them were vices which are the natural result of slavery. They had not been free long enough to know how to use their freedom. The death of all those who had grown up to manhood as slaves would have a great effect in destroying the slavish character of the people. We find from other histories that the setting free of a large number of slaves very generally causes, for two or three generations, great trouble, both to the slaves themselves and to their neighbours. Some people say that this trouble proves that freedom is not necessarily a good thing; but it would be wiser to say that it proves how bad a thing slavery must be, if its bad consequences last so long. The forty years in the desert gave the Israelites an opportunity for undergoing the discipline without interruption.

2. Very often, when there is some duty which we know we ought to perform, we put it off from day to day, till at last it is too late. The lesson teaches us that the time 'too late' may come for a whole generation as truly as for one person. The plain moral is that what we know to be our duty should be accomplished with all our power, and at once; if we act in that way we shall have God's help; but a time may come when it will be useless even to try to accomplish what we have once unfaithfully left undone.

LESSON 66.

Read Numbers xx. 1—13.

THE events of which we have just read an account happened at Kadesh, the place where the rebellion which led to the appointment of the forty years' wandering had occurred. But, as will be

explained more fully in the next lesson, we have reason to believe that the greater part of the forty years' wandering comes between the two events. This passage is most remarkable, because it shows us that Moses and Aaron, the two leaders of the people, exposed themselves by their own conduct to the same punishment as the people whom they led. Neither of them was to be allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

The end of the tenth verse is the part of the reading which gives us the reason why this punishment was inflicted. As we read the words we are inclined to think that the punishment was very great for so small an offence. The offence, however, was not so small as it seems. Moses had seen enough of God's dealings with men, and knew enough of what God had done by him for the people, to be quite sure that what was done for the people was really God's doing, although he was used as the agent or instrument. But in his vexation he forgot all about this, and claimed the power of giving the people water to drink as his own power and Aaron's. 'Must we fetch you water out of this rock?' were the words he used. And then, still showing his irritation, he struck the rock to which he had been commanded to speak. First claiming a power which belonged only to God, and then disobeying God's command, cannot be called a small offence. If, therefore, this was the only occasion on which we know Moses to have done wrong, still we could not say that he did not deserve severe punishment for it. But, as we must now carefully remember, this was not the first time, by any means, that the impatience and hasty spirit of Moses had brought him into trouble. There are many actions of his, which we have been obliged to call wrong actions, and this, the last, though, perhaps, not the worst of them, was the natural consequence of those which had gone before. There is very little doubt that, of all the men of whom we read in the Bible or in any other history, Moses was one of the noblest, most brave and self-sacrificing; but even he did not perfectly obey God's commandments, and therefore had to suffer the punishment of disobedience. The trust in God and the desire to do good to his fellow-men, to love his neighbour because he loved God, which distinguished Moses so clearly from the men who lived at the same time, make him not only a better man than they were, but also an example in many ways to us. Still, when we find that such a man was punished as severely for his offences as the ignorant, thoughtless, unbelieving Israelites were punished for theirs, we are obliged to think about the matter very seriously. We sometimes fancy that good people—that is to say, people whose conduct is generally in accordance with God's laws—are allowed now and then to disobey these laws without being called

to account for their deeds quite so strictly as other people. That is a very dreadful mistake. God has no favourites, as some earthly rulers have. Every deed is punished or rewarded as it is bad or good, not at all because it was done by one man or another.

No part of this lesson is intended to refer to the condition of Moses in another life: the punishment for his sin came in this life. We shall see afterwards that we have the best of reasons for knowing that none of his good and faithful deeds went without their full reward.

LESSON 67.

The Wanderings of the Children of Israel.

THIS lesson is concerned with the forty years' wandering of the Israelites. An exact account of all they did and all the places they visited is impossible, because all that remains of the history of the time is a list of their encampments, the names of which it is impossible now to recognise, and an account of one or two events which happened during the time, but at what part of the forty years no one knows with certainty.

First, we will consider what is meant by the word 'Wanderings;' next, something shall be said of the general character of the country in which they took place; and, thirdly, we will close the lesson with a brief account of the doings of Moses and the people under his care when the forty years were drawing to an end.

1. When we speak of a man or of a number of men as wandering, we generally mean that they are going about they do not know where, looking for some place which they cannot find. But that is not the meaning of the word as applied to the Israelites. They knew where they wanted to go, and knew pretty nearly where they were all the time. But they were not allowed to proceed to the end of their journey: they were commanded to remain in the wilderness. Their condition can best be understood by comparing them to a tribe of Bedaween or wandering Arabs, such as still inhabit that part of the desert. They live always in tents, and have very often large numbers of sheep and camels. Sometimes their tents remain in the same place for many months together, but they do not look upon any place as their home. As soon as their flocks have eaten up all the grass and other herbage that is near their tents, they take up their tents, pack them on the backs of their camels, and go away—men, women, and children, with flocks and herds—to some other place where they can find food. When the food there is finished, they go somewhere else, and so on. This manner of life is called *nomadic*; so that one may say that during the forty years the Israelites were a nomadic tribe. But we must remember, that does not mean always moving

about because people don't know where they are; it means going from one place to another as they are obliged to go, and having no settled home.

2. Until a few years ago very little was known of the country in which these forty years were spent. The greater part of it is now so fearfully barren that very few travellers have ever passed through it. But nearly all who have studied the accounts given in the Bible have agreed that it was the high and almost level country north of the Mount Sinai.

In a lesson on the geography of Mount Sinai the letter A turned upside down was given as a rough hint for remembering the shape of the peninsula of Sinai, and the position of the chief mountains. If now we make dotted lines to lengthen the legs of the A, those dotted lines will pretty nearly mark the position of two valleys, between which is a table-land or plateau, called El-Tih. These dotted lines will also mark the eastern and western limits of the wanderings; the northern limit would be an irregular line joining their ends. In the winter of 1869-70 two gentlemen walked over nearly all this extent of country. They found that its southern part is very barren, though in some districts even there, in the season of the rains, there was grass enough for large flocks of sheep. The northern part is, however, full of 'wadys,' or valleys, which contain many springs, and are by no means destitute of vegetation. Their opinion was that a nation like the Israelites could have lived there for any length of time in the manner described.



3. The Wanderings commenced at a place called Kadesh, which still has a name very similar, namely, Gadis. When the time was very nearly spent the people returned to Kadesh, and from that place Moses sent messages to the kings of countries which were on the east of the eastern valley, asking them for permission to pass through their territories, and promising to pay the full price for everything that might be required for the maintenance of the people. The request was refused, and in consequence of the refusal the army of the Israelites fought and conquered the nation of the Amorites. This conquest brought the Israelites quite close to the land which had been promised to them; so close, indeed, that they were separated from it only by the deep valley and the stream of the Jordan. The plains of Moab, in which they remained for some time, were constantly fertile, and were therefore in strong contrast to the desert in which they had been wandering. Balak, king of the Moabites, who had heard of the destruction of the Amorites, and who was afraid that he himself would share the same fate, was very much alarmed, and sent for a prophet named

Balaam to curse them. But Balaam blessed instead of cursing them, so that the king's first plan failed. However, he tried another plan which succeeded better; he made friends of the Israelites, and induced many of the people to worship the false gods of the Moabites. Their unfaithfulness to the true God was severely punished.

Soon afterwards God told Moses that the time was come when he must die. As we have heard already, Moses was not to enter Canaan; but God told him that he should see a great part of the land from the top of one of the mountains of Moab. Before going up to the mountain, from which he knew he would never come down again, Moses called the people together, and told them of all their doings, bad and good, and of all God's dealings with them from the time when they left Egypt. He also gave them much wise advice about what they should do when he was gone from them. These speeches, which include a repetition of the Ten Commandments and of the other principal laws, are recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, the name of which means 'the second law.'

LESSON 68.

Read Deuteronomy xxxiv.

THE account of the death of Moses, which we have just read, is at once very grand and very touching. We are told in the preceding chapters that he summoned all the people to appear before him, and, after telling them of all the great works which God had wrought for their fathers and for themselves, solemnly bade them farewell. Then he left them, and went up to the top of a high mountain, where, alone with God, he died, in sight of the land promised to Israel which he was never to enter.

The manner and the place of his death seem to have harmonised wonderfully with his life and character. When he was on the mountain-top, with no fellow-creature near him, he was not more really alone—that is, he was not more completely removed from human sympathy—than he had often been in the midst of the encampments of the Israelites.

In character and in power of mind also, he was so high above other men that the summit of a high mountain seemed a fit place for him to die in. Besides, although he died at so great an age—he was 120 years old when he died—we are told that he retained to the very last the full strength of his mind and body—'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.' And so the deep impression which his character and example were to make on mankind was not lessened by the remembrance of any of the weaknesses which often attend the last part of a very long life.

But the point which we must dwell upon especially to-day is that although Moses did not live to see the results which he may have hoped to see come from his long and faithful labours, yet the results of them, after his death, far exceeded any expectations he could have formed of them.

Eighty years had passed away from the time when he made his first attempt to deliver his brethren the children of Israel: forty years had been spent in exile and in silent preparation, and forty years after that in anxious and continued efforts to lead his brethren from the land of their bondage to the land which God had promised to give them. He had made them into a nation, he had given them a complete code of wise laws, and had brought them to the very borders of the land which they were to possess: yet he was not allowed to enter it himself, or to see them enter it. But to him we may well apply the words of the Book of Revelation: 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; . . . that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.'

The task which Moses had so far advanced at the time of his death was taken up and completed by others; and not only were the Israelites established in the Land of Promise, but the example and the teaching of Moses became a light and a blessing to many other nations, whose existence only began ages after his death.

Thus it is often with good, true, and conscientious work. For a time it may seem to have led to no results, but it is never really lost; in the fulness of time it brings forth rich fruits of a kind which those who did it had never looked for.

What we learn from the history of Moses is that we should work on patiently and perseveringly in what we believe to be right ways, without always expecting to be encouraged by seeing the fruit of our labours. This is a lesson which we all require to learn. Mankind have in all times been led by their longing for speedy results to fly to quack remedies for deep-rooted evils, and to neglect the slow, sure remedies in which alone the cure for such evils is generally to be found.

The more we study history the more clearly do we learn that the greatest blessings mankind have secured have been earned by long persevering efforts, often spread over several successive generations.

For instance, the efforts of the men of one generation to improve the education of a people have seldom borne any marked and visible fruits in the lifetime of that generation; but they have remained as a store of blessing to generations to come. The greatest benefactors of mankind have been the men who have tried to regulate their lives and deeds by sound, true principles, leaving the issues in patient faith in the hands of God.

The work of Moses was blessed beyond measure in the earthly fruits it bore after his death. How blessed he was in the rest to which God called him after his weary, anxious life we know from the account given in the New Testament of his appearance with Elijah at the Transfiguration of our Saviour. Moses had tried to set forth truth, justice, and self-sacrifice in his earthly life, and in his heavenly life he was privileged to live with Him who is our perfect Example of those virtues.

LESSON 69.

General Account of Palestine.

WHEN the days of mourning for Moses were ended, the people were ready to go forward into Canaan. Before we read the history of their crossing the Jordan and their conquest of the land, let us try to get as clear an idea as we can of the nature of the land itself. If we could go to the mountain where Moses stood we should be able to see a great part of the land, and should know more of its appearance than we can ever hope to know now. But as we cannot do that at present, and as, most likely, very few of us ever will visit the land of Canaan, we must endeavour to find out as much as we can from books written by those who have visited it.

The first thing to be noticed is the very small extent of the country. Its length from north to south is about 200 miles, and its width generally about 80 miles, though in one part it reaches 120 miles. To compare its extent with the extent of England: Canaan, Palestine, or the Holy Land, is about the same size as that part of England which is to the south of a line joining the Severn and the Thames, say from Gloucester to Oxford. It has surprised some people to be told that the country, whose inhabitants have exercised so great an influence over other people, was so small; but it need not surprise us. We know that the importance of a country does not depend upon its size; if it did, England would not be an important country.

Within the narrow limits of Canaan we find very great contrasts, in scenery, in climate, and in natural productions. The reason of this variety is the very hilly nature of the land. It is a land of hills, as, indeed, it is described in the Bible. A gentleman who has studied the geography of the country very carefully says that we may divide it into four strips, running side by side, from north to south. The first of these, to the west—that is, nearest to the Mediterranean Sea—is nearly all level or plain country, and is very well adapted for the growing of corn. Next to that is a strip of high ground, forming the middle part of the country, and consisting chiefly of limestone hills. This middle strip, if carefully

cultivated, would yield abundant crops of olives and grapes on its hill-sides, and of corn in the valleys between the hills. The third strip is a very deep valley, or gorge, the bottom of which is very far below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. From its depth this valley is very warm, and would produce the fruits and spices which generally grow only in tropical climates. The river Jordan runs in this valley from its source at the southern end of Lebanon, through the lake which is sometimes called the Sea of Chinneroth, sometimes the Sea of Galilee, and sometimes the Lake of Gennesareth, to the Dead Sea, where it finishes its course, about 1,300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. One necessary result of the existence of this deep gorge is, that all journeys from the middle of the country eastward are down a steep hill, and, of course, journeys in the other direction are up the same hill. By bearing this fact in mind we shall understand why the words 'up' and 'down' are used so often in the Bible narratives. The last strip is the country generally called, from its position, 'beyond Jordan,'¹ which consists of grassy plains affording plentiful food for sheep and cattle, and stretching away to a range of mountains which form the eastern boundary. None of the strips described remain of exactly the same character all the way from north to south. The hills encroach upon the plain at a few points, and two plains at least are found in the hilly district, viz. the Plain of Esdraelon, and the Plain of Shechem; while the valley of the Jordan is much more deep and rugged at its southern than at its northern end; but the division, on the whole, seems to be pretty accurate.

When the natural productions of the various parts of the country were mentioned, a statement was made as to what *would* grow there if the land were properly cultivated. It might have been said that such things once *did* grow there, but they grew there no longer. All travellers are struck by the exceedingly bare appearance of great parts of the country, and have some difficulty in understanding how so barren and dry a land could ever have deserved the name of a land of corn and oil and wine, or the name of a land of brooks and streams, both which names are given to it in the Bible. But those who have dwelt some time in the country, and have examined it very carefully, tell us that they find nearly everywhere proofs that it was once far more fertile and better watered than it is now. On the sides of many of the hills, even very far to the south, extending almost to the desert which was the scene of the Forty Years' Wanderings of the Israelites, there are remains of terraces which

¹ The teacher will not fail to notice that the expression 'on this side Jordan' has two different meanings as used in the Pentateuch and

in the later historical books. In the former case it means east, in the latter west, of the river.

were cut in the limestone, to keep the earth from being washed into the valleys, and to give soil for olive-trees and vines. Very probably the work of cultivation was hard, but those who know best say that the harvest and vintage paid the cultivators very amply for their toil. Where the same care is taken now, and where water can be obtained, the olives and grapes are said to be abundant and of very superior quality.

The present scarcity of water in Palestine stands in strong contrast with the fact that in the Bible Canaan is called a land of brooks and streams. The streams that are found there now, generally run with very great violence during the rainy season, and when the dry season has fairly begun disappear almost entirely. This great change can be explained very easily. The hills were once covered with trees which have now been destroyed: the result of leaving hills without trees is to make the rainy season more wet, the dry season more parching, and finally to dry up most of the springs, and to make the others, which are not dried up, extremely variable. Canaan is not the only country which has thus been changed. By man's reckless disregard of natural laws, many fertile lands have been made altogether barren: but that the land inhabited by the Israelites, who had had the laws so forcibly impressed on them, should be the most striking example of the change, is a fact which we should try to bear in mind, and which has attracted much attention from those who have written on the geography of Palestine.

LESSON 70.

Read Joshua vi.

WHEN Moses was dead, the command of the Israelites was given to Joshua, who had for many years been Moses' constant attendant, and who had been named by him as his successor. The Israelites were still, as we must remember, on the eastern side of the river Jordan, which they had to cross before the greater part of them could settle in their new homes. Lands were given to two tribes and half of another tribe on the eastern side of the river, where their flocks and herds would find pasture; but the condition was made that their grown-up men should assist their brethren in the conquest of the remainder of the land. They left their property there and took the lead of the host, being the more ready to meet any sudden attack that might be made by the Canaanites, because they were not burdened with baggage. The whole host crossed the river just above the point at which it enters the Dead Sea, the waters dividing to allow them to pass, as the waters of the Red Sea had divided for their fathers forty years before. The most important city, or walled town, of Canaan, in the neighbourhood of the place

where they crossed the river, was Jericho ; the town stood where a village named El Rihah stands now, on gently-sloping ground about five or six miles from the Jordan. Behind the village the hills, broken by numerous deep ravines, rise steeply towards the interior of the country. Before the whole host of the Israelites crossed, Joshua had sent spies to find out what they could about the town. They had been for a time in great danger, but had been delivered by a woman named Rahab, to whom they promised protection when they should gain possession of the town. We have read just now how that promise was kept.

This was the state of affairs at the time when the narrative of the present chapter begins. The Israelites had crossed the Jordan, and were encamped quite near to Jericho, but fighting had not commenced.

Now we are ready to consider the history itself. It is told so plainly that there are not many difficulties to explain. One can almost fancy, if one tries, what a sight it must have been ; how the priests, dressed in their robes of purple and scarlet and white, went first, blowing on trumpets ; how next to them came those whose duty it was to bear the Ark, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, that golden chest in which the tables of stone, on which the Law was written, were kept ; and how the great multitude of the men of Israel followed in order. They were no more a wandering caravan, but a regularly-marshalled army.

All this is easily understood ; but, besides this, we may wish to know something of the reason why the city was surrounded and taken in the manner described instead of by fighting, and also why commands were given that all the people in the city, except the woman who had been kind to the spies, and her family, should be put to death, and all their property destroyed.

Of course, it is not intended here to explain how it was that the walls of Jericho fell down when the trumpets sounded and the people gave a shout : that was what we call a miracle, that is to say, it was God's power that did it, not man's. But this fact helps us to understand why the first city the Israelites reached should have been taken without their fighting for it. God Himself had commanded them to invade the land, and had promised that they should possess it as their own. He had taught them also, by Moses, that it was by His power that they should conquer their enemies. And in this destruction of the walls of the first city they reached, He gave them an encouraging proof of His willingness and ability to fulfil His promise. They were made to be patient, they walked round the city six days and nothing happened, but on the seventh the walls fell down flat.

Both these lessons, that of trust in the help of God, and that

of patience, were much needed by the Israelites, and were very useful to them in the toilsome times which came after.

But, now, why were the people killed and all their goods destroyed? They had dwelt a long time in Canaan, and had done evil all the time. They were not only idolaters, but in many other ways most wicked and impure. If any of them had been allowed to remain and mix with the Israelites they would very probably have made the Chosen People as wicked as themselves. The destruction of the goods of the Canaanites was intended to check the desire of conquest simply for the sake of getting wealth. The Israelites were not to attack and destroy the cities for their own gain, but only because God had commanded them to do so.

LESSON 71.

The Gradual Conquest of Canaan.

THE capture of Jericho was followed almost immediately by a defeat of a part of the Israelite army. A detachment of 3,000 men advanced from Jericho, up one of the steep ascents leading to the centre of the country, to Ai, a town which stood on the high ground about midway between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. But they not only failed to take the town, they were repulsed with slaughter. It was soon found that this defeat was a punishment for disobedience on the part of one of the chief men of Israel to the commands given concerning the spoil of Jericho. When the guilty man had been discovered and punished, the assault was repeated. Ai was taken and destroyed. The capture of Ai laid open a way by which the people could reach the Plain of Shechem, where, between the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, they were collected to hear the Law once more solemnly read in their ears. This amount of success alarmed the kings of Canaan, who made a league against Joshua. But one tribe, the Gibeonites, by representing themselves as inhabitants of a very distant land, when in fact they lived close by, induced the Israelites to make a treaty of peace with them. When the news of this treaty spread among the other tribes, the kings of five nations dwelling in the south of Palestine united to punish the Gibeonites as traitors. The Gibeonites sent at once to Joshua, asking him to help them; and he, although they had very grossly deceived him, marched to their rescue. The battle lasted all day, and ended in the total defeat of the five confederated kings. After the one day's battle with the combined armies, Joshua marched against their towns and took them one by one, and the first campaign resulted in making the Israelites masters to a certain extent of the chief cities of the south of Canaan. But this was only the beginning of the work of con-

quest. It seems that the people did not yet feel themselves quite secure in any place but in their first encampment, for we are told that 'Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp to Gilgal.' That was still their head-quarters; they could not settle in peace, even in the part of the land which they had conquered, so long as the greater part of the land remained unsubdued. The utter destruction of all the old inhabitants of even so small a country as Canaan would not be easy even now, with an army trained and equipped as modern armies are. When there were no such implements of war as guns and cannons, only spears and swords and bows and arrows, it must have been a much longer task. It may be stated here, to show how very gradually Canaan was conquered by the Israelites, that it was not until the time of David, very many years later, that the last mountain-tribe of the south, the Jebusites, were driven out of their fortress, which was on one of the hills where Jerusalem now stands. The first step in the conquest, which has been described at some length, made the Israelites masters of the land south of a line drawn across the country from Jericho in a direction nearly west. Before long, news was brought to Joshua, who was still with the army at Gilgal, that the kings of the northern nations had formed an alliance against him. He did not wait for them to attack him, but advanced against them, and came upon their united armies at the waters of Merom, near the source of the Jordan. Again the whole army of the Canaanites was routed, and again Joshua attacked and destroyed the cities from which they had come out, one by one.

Then, it appears, the people needed rest. Joshua was growing old, and nearly as much fighting had been done as one generation could accomplish. However, before Joshua allowed them to settle in the districts assigned to them, tribe by tribe, he told them that there was still work to be done, and that they must remember that their work was not finished as long as any part of the land promised to their forefathers remained in the possession of the Canaanites and the other heathen tribes. A formal division was made of the land, of the unconquered as well as the conquered parts, and the boundaries of the several tribes were described with great minuteness.

At the same time, the Tabernacle, which was the continual remembrance to the Israelites of God's presence with them, was set up at Shiloh, near the centre of the country, so that from all parts the adult males might come to it at the appointed times. This may be called the formal act of taking possession of the country, and a sign that the conquest was so far complete. At Shiloh the tabernacle remained until the beginning of the period of the Kings.

From this place Joshua sent away the soldiers of the two tribes and a half whose possessions were on the eastern side of the Jordan, commending them for their faithfulness to their brethren, and thanking them for their assistance in subduing the Canaanites. 'Joshua blessed them and sent them away; and they went unto their tents.' But, lest they or their children should forget that they were a part of the same nation with those who dwelt west of the Jordan, they built at the ford of Jordan a great altar, which they called an altar of 'witness that the Lord is God.' And then, we read, 'the Lord gave rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about.'

LESSON 72.

Read Joshua xxiv.

THERE are two reasons why the chapter just read is especially interesting: first, it contains an epitome of the history of the Israelites during an important period; and, secondly, it describes the end of that period.

Joshua, the commander of the people, was now an old man, and knew that the time was close at hand when he would be removed from them, and when, in consequence of his death, they would be left to govern themselves. Moses before his death had appointed Joshua to succeed him, according to the command of God, but Joshua had received no command of the same kind. All that could be done for the people by teachers and leaders had been done; they had a law and constitution, and were settled in homes of their own. From that time they were to act for themselves, and take upon themselves all the responsibility of their actions. If they obeyed the laws of God which Moses had given them they would continue to increase and grow strong; if they chose to disobey the laws of God severe punishment would surely follow. It was therefore a very solemn time, and Joshua seems to have felt its solemnity when he called the chief men of all the tribes of Israel together to his residence at Shechem, and made his last address to them, urging them most earnestly to continue in the fear and worship of the One True God. He began his address by telling them how God had called their forefather Abraham from a family of idolaters, and had blessed him and instructed him in the truth. He then told them very briefly how Jacob and his sons had gone down into Egypt, and how Moses and Aaron were sent by God to deliver their descendants from Egyptian slavery. Joshua then described in few words the various deliverances which God had worked for the people in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. He told them of the passage of the Red Sea, of the failure of the attempts of Balak and Balaam to curse them, of the conquest of the nations who

dwelt east of the Jordan, and lastly of the success of the wars, in which he had been their commander, against the inhabitants of Canaan itself, concluding this account of the past by reminding them of the plenty in which they were then living. If we compare this address with the last speeches of Moses, we find one great difference, namely, that Moses reminded the people of their many rebellions and murmurings against God, but that Joshua said nothing of these. The reason, so far as we can judge, of the difference is that Joshua wanted to excite only the feeling of gratitude, whereas Moses wanted to make the people sorry for their past misdeeds.

After telling the people of all these good things which God had done for them, Joshua exhorted them to be faithful and obedient to God.

Still he seems to have had some fear lest they should be unfaithful and disobedient, and especially lest they should fall into idolatry; and therefore he required them to choose, while he was with them, either the worship of the ancient idols and the gods of the old inhabitants of Canaan, or the worship of the One True God. His own mind was made up; he and his house, *i.e.* his family, would 'serve the Lord.'

The rulers of the people replied at once that they would serve the Lord, who had brought them out of Egypt. The words which they used seem like the words of men who were almost angry that anyone should think them in danger of forsaking the service of God.

But Joshua knew them better than they knew themselves, and therefore he repeated his warnings still more earnestly. He seems to have acted on the principle which St. Paul set forth many centuries afterwards: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' Over-confidence is one of the worst of dangers. Joshua told them that pretended fear of God and half-hearted service were worse than downright disobedience. Again they declared that they would serve the Lord. Then a formal and solemn covenant was made, and a monument of stone erected as a witness against the people in case they should deny God.

After that the chiefs of the tribes departed again to their homes, and not long afterwards Joshua died and was buried. The chapter which we have read concludes with an account of the disposal of the last relic of the wanderings; it tells us of the burial in Shechem of the embalmed body of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up with them from Egypt. We cannot be sure that this burial took place after the death of Joshua; indeed, it seems most likely that the history is not in exact chronological order, but the writer of the book concludes with this to show that at last the people felt themselves at home, and carried out the wishes which were

expressed at his death by the man who had been the means of preserving their ancestors and making them a nation.

LESSON 73.

The Judges, their Office and Influence.

AFTER the death of Joshua the Israelites were without any single ruler. Each man did what was right in his own eyes, and, as a natural result, it was not very long before they reached a state of disorder and confusion. The fear which Joshua expressed in his last speech, namely, that the people would forsake the Lord and serve false gods, was proved, by what took place after his death, to be a reasonable fear. While the generation of those who had known and had served under Joshua remained alive, the great body of the people followed their counsel, and remained faithful to the law of Moses. But when they also were dead, the younger generation forgot the solemn covenant that had been made between them and the Lord their God, and fell into idolatry; they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth, the gods of the nations that were round about them. The consequence of which Joshua had warned them speedily followed; instead of being at peace and living in plenty and prosperity, they were oppressed and enslaved by their heathen neighbours. The whole Book of Judges is a record of successive acts of unfaithfulness to God, and of the punishments which followed those acts. A brief account of the history of the period will be given in the next lesson. The object of this lesson is to explain what was the office and the influence of those Judges from whom the book receives its name.

In many instances suffering, and the knowledge that the suffering was no more than they deserved for their wrong-doing, brought the people to their senses. They remembered that it had been well with them as long as they had obeyed God, and, in their desire to be delivered from their sufferings, they promised that if they were allowed to be free once more they would not disobey again. Their release from oppression was generally the result of a renewal of the spirit which we call the spirit of patriotism. Some brave man called together as many as he could of his fellow-Israelites, and either openly or secretly made war against their oppressors. The leader was not always what we should call a good man, nor was the conduct of the people led by him always such as we should wish to imitate; but two great things were always present to their minds, namely, hatred of idols and idol-worship, and trust in the power of God. Therefore we are told that these leaders were raised up by God for the deliverance of His people. Even their stubborn

bravery was regarded by them as a divine power, apart from the personal goodness of the men who exercised it.

When a revolt against a heathen enemy had succeeded, there was always a great deal to do among the Israelites themselves. Their selfishness and sin had made them subject to their enemies, and when they had thrown off the yoke of the oppressor they still needed to be set free from their own internal faults. Of course, it was quite natural that they should pay more attention to a man who had shown himself to be brave and strong than to any other man; and so the commander in a successful war against the heathen enemies usually continued in command of the people during the peace which followed. His work then consisted principally in settling and arranging matters which had become confused and disordered in the time of oppression, in enforcing the Law and deciding disputes between the people. From this part of his work the name by which such a man was generally called was the name 'Judge.' When, therefore, we read about the period of the Judges, which lasted from the death of Joshua to the beginning of the reign of Saul, we must not think of those Judges as only persons who decided cases according to the law, but chiefly as soldiers, men full of patriotism, who led their fellow-countrymen in their struggles against the oppressors to whom their own sins enslaved them for generation after generation. For a time the Judge had absolute power, but as soon as the special danger or the special need was past, he was no more than any other Israelite.

Two other facts must be borne in mind if we would understand the extent of the power of a 'Judge.' If we read the Book of Judges without very great care we may, perhaps, come to the conclusion that the several Judges named there succeeded each other almost in the same way as kings succeed each other in England, and so we may see very little difference between the rule of judges and that of kings. But, reading more carefully, we find these two facts: first, a Judge held office only for the benefit of the people, and never passed it on to his son or any descendant; second, it very seldom happened that the whole of the Israelites were in trouble at one time, and scarcely ever that the same Judge ruled or led them all. Each was raised up to meet a need in his own neighbourhood; his own tribe, and perhaps one or two of the adjoining tribes, obeyed him, but to the tribes in other parts of the land he made no appeal, and received from them no help. So the period of the Judges was not a time of union among the Israelites, but of separation to so great an extent that they very nearly lost the sense that they were one nation. Indeed, some of the most bloody wars of the time were wars between rival tribes of Israelites, or what we now should call civil wars.

LESSON 74.

The Judges ; Some Leading Facts of the History.

OUR last lesson was on the meaning of the name and also the duties discharged by the Judges of the Israelites. A short account of a few of the principal events of the period will now enable us to form some notion of the condition of the people. The first idolatry of the Israelites was punished by an invasion from the north-east, under Chushan Rishathaim, King of Mesopotamia ; but upon their repentance they were delivered by a Judge named Othniel. Again they sinned, and were oppressed by the King of Moab, but were delivered from his oppression by Ehud. After Ehud's death they sinned again, and suffered even more than before ; but at the end of twenty years a prophetess named Deborah and a soldier named Barak collected an army and fought a great battle, in which the heathen army was entirely defeated. This was a deliverance of the tribes who had settled in the north and north-east of Palestine.

The next piece of history contained in the Book of Judges is very interesting and important, for it shows us the character of one of the noblest of the deliverers of Israel. The people had once more fallen into idolatry and had set up images of Baal and Ash-taroth to worship them. This unfaithfulness was punished by the invasions of the wild tribes of the desert, who are called by the general name of Midianites. In their incursions they carried away all the cattle and all the crops of the Israelites, and so alarmed the people themselves that they fled to the most secure hiding-places they could find, in the dens and caves of the limestone hills which form the central ridge of the country. One young man, whose name was Gideon, the youngest son of Joash, was threshing wheat in a secret place to hide it from the Midianites, when a messenger from God came to him and told him that he should deliver the people from their enemies. At first, in his humility, he could scarcely believe that he could be called to so great a work and so great an honour ; but when he was convinced of the truth of the message he began his work in a noble way. The first step he took was the destruction of the image of Baal which his father and his kinsmen worshipped. This daring act roused the anger of his fellow-townsmen, and they resolved to put him to death for what they considered his impiety. But his father answered for him : ' If Baal be a god let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar ; ' and on the same day gave to Gideon the name ' Jerubbaal.' Having convinced the people that Baal had no power, even to save himself, much less to save or deliver them, Gideon called them together in the name of the Lord, for the purpose of leading them against the

Midianites. A large army followed him, but by God's commands it was twice reduced. First, Gideon gave permission to all those who were fearful and afraid to depart to their homes. This left him ten thousand men, out of whom only three hundred of the coolest and most cautious were retained. All the others were sent away, and, with only three hundred men, Gideon attacked an army which 'lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude.' The small band was divided into three companies, which were set round the camp of Midian at nightfall. Each man had a trumpet and an earthen pitcher, in which was concealed a lamp. At a signal from Gideon all the pitchers were broken so that the lamps shone out, and the trumpets were sounded, and the men shouted, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!' The great host of the Midianites, confused by the sudden light and the sudden sound, turned their arms against each other, and the mighty army melted away. The remnant of them was pursued by Gideon and his small band, strengthened by reinforcements from all the towns, and the chief princes, Oreb and Zeeb and Zebah and Zalmunna, were slain. After the victory the people asked Gideon to be their king, but he refused, saying, 'I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over; the Lord shall rule over you.' For forty years he kept the land in quietness, and then died, and was forgotten. As soon as he was dead the Israelites turned again to the worship of Baal.

From even this brief account of Gideon's life it is tolerably evident that he was not only a brave warrior, but a good man. There are two other persons who must be mentioned, to whom we can only give the praise due to bravery, for they were not distinguished for wisdom or goodness. These persons are Jephthah and Samson.

Jephthah was scarcely an Israelite by birth, but he was accepted by a large body of Israelites as their leader, and defeated the Ammonites with great slaughter. He is remembered chiefly because of a foolish vow he made, to sacrifice the first thing that met him on his return home from the war, if he should return in triumph. He was met by his only daughter, whom he sacrificed.

Samson delivered the people of the south-west of Palestine from the oppression of the Philistines. His strength was very great, but was unwisely used. At last, by his own folly, he lost his strength and fell into the power of his enemies, who blinded and imprisoned him. In prison his strength returned. One day, when he was brought out to perform some feats of strength for the amusement of the Philistine nobles, he desired to rest against the main pillar or support of the building in which they were gathered; he shook it with all his might, pulled down the building upon his foes, and himself died with them in the ruins.

LESSON 75.

The Story of Ruth.

FROM the last two lessons we have learnt that the time of the Judges was a wild and stormy time, such as, one would think, must have been unfavourable to anything like domestic peace and happiness. That impression will, however, be modified if we consider some points of a short history which is contained in our English Bibles in a separate book, called the Book of Ruth, but which in many old copies of the written Hebrew Bible is found in one roll with, and forming part of, the Book of Judges.

Yet this history, graceful and sweet as it is, bears traces of the confusion of the times.

A famine, which was possibly the result of one of the wars which desolated the land, pressed hard upon the dwellers in the south of Palestine. A man of Bethlehem, named Elimelech, took his wife Naomi and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, and went to the heathen land of Moab. There he died, and his sons, forgetting the command of Moses, who had forbidden any alliance with the heathen, married heathen wives, women of Moab, named Orpah and Ruth. About ten years after the departure of the family from Bethlehem, the two sons of Naomi also died, and she was left alone in a heathen land, with her two heathen daughters-in-law. In her loneliness she determined to return to her old home at Bethlehem, and set out in company with Orpah and Ruth. When they came to the place where they were to part, she blessed and kissed them, and told them to return each to her mother's home. They said that they would go with her, but she advised them to return and forget their bereavements in new marriages with husbands of their own people. Orpah returned, but Ruth would not be persuaded. Ruth clave unto Naomi. The old woman again said to her, 'Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.' Ruth's answer was full of love for her mother-in-law, and also showed how deeply she felt the words, 'unto her gods.' Her Israelite husband seems to have taught her the worship of the true God, for her words are as full of faith as they are of love. She said to Naomi, 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.' So they went on together, and came to Bethlehem, where Naomi was recognised by her old

friends and called by her old name. But she, in her depth of sorrow, said, 'Call me not Naomi' (which means, 'pleasant'), but 'call me Mara' (which means 'bitter'), 'for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.'

The time of their return was the time of harvest, and Ruth begged Naomi to allow her to go into the corn-fields to glean the ears that fell on the ground for food for them both. She knew, it appears, that she had a right to glean, for Moses had commanded that the ears which fell on the ground should be left for 'the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless.' The field to which she went happened to belong to Boaz, a great man of that part of the country, and a near relation of Elimelech, the father of her dead husband. From Boaz she received great kindness; he allowed her not only to glean in his field, but to sit with his maidens and to dine with them. He told her that he had heard of her love to her mother-in-law, and blessed her in these words: 'The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings (protection) thou art come to trust.' After some little time, the princely Boaz showed how great an impression the beauty and the virtue of the young widow had made upon him, by claiming the right of his near relationship to her late husband, and marrying her.

From that marriage there was born a son, who restored to Naomi the pleasure of her early years: the women of the little town came and brought the child to her, and showed their joy by saying, 'Blessed be the Lord: thy daughter-in-law which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.' And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

This story, which has been told as nearly as possible in the Bible's own words, is extremely interesting as a beautiful story of home life, of faithful love and virtue. But there is another reason why it stands in the Bible. The child of Ruth, named Obed, was father of Jesse, and grandfather of David. So the greatest king, and, next to Moses, perhaps the greatest man, of the Israelite nation was descended from the young heathen widow who left her home and her people to be joined to the people of the God of Abraham.

LESSON 76.

Read 1 Samuel iii.

WITH to-day's lesson we begin the story of a man who occupies a very important place in the history of Israel. Samuel was the last judge of the Israelites, the first of the order of prophets, and by performing the office of anointing the first two kings of Israel seems

almost to have gained the name of founder of the monarchy. In order that we may understand the chapter just read, we must go back a little way and epitomise the history which is contained in the two preceding chapters.

The period of the Judges was nearly at an end when Samuel was born. The Tabernacle, with the altar of burnt offerings, and the ark, was still at Shiloh, where it had been set up in the time of Joshua, and still, according to the commands of Moses, the people came to that place to keep the solemn feasts. Among those who came was a man named Elkanah, whose wife, Hannah, was in great sorrow, because she had no children. On one of their visits Hannah made a vow or promise to God that if He would give her a son she would dedicate him to the service of God. This vow was made in the presence of the high-priest Eli, although the nature of it was not then declared to him, and when, some time afterwards, a son was born to Hannah, it was strictly fulfilled. As soon as the child, whom his mother called Samuel—that is, ‘asked of God,’ or ‘heard by God’—was old enough to be separated from his parents, they took him to Shiloh and left him there, that he might wait upon Eli, and assist him in the duties which he had to perform in the Tabernacle. Year after year, when his mother went to Shiloh, she took a little coat as a present to her son, who, it is said, grew before the Lord, or, as we should probably say, was a good boy and was religiously and piously brought up.

Eli appears, by what we read of him, to have been a good old man, that is to say, he was himself attentive to his duties, but in one important matter of duty he failed altogether. His sons, who acted under him, he being high-priest, and they priests, were wicked men, and treated those who came to Shiloh, both men and women, with such oppression and wantonness that men abhorred the offering of the Lord. Eli heard of their wicked doings, and only talked quietly to them about their conduct, but so quietly and mildly that they took no notice of his words. Then there came a man of God to Eli, and told him that because of the iniquity of his sons all his family should be cut off, that Hophni and Phinehas, for so the sons were named, should die in one day, and that the high-priesthood should pass into another family, that is, another branch of the house of Aaron. At the same time there were spoken words hard to understand, which seemed to point to some great calamity to come upon the whole nation: we shall see before long how the prophecy was accomplished.

This message appears not to have made much impression upon Eli, and therefore, we may suppose, it was repeated in a way which he could not help feeling very deeply.

We have read to-day how God called the child Samuel and

told him what He intended to do to Eli and Eli's family. This is an instance of what often occurs even now, of the rebuking of the sins or follies of old people by the lips of an innocent child. Very often a child's words accomplish what the words of a grown-up person could not do. To all the young who hear it, this story of Samuel is very interesting, and therefore it is important to call young persons' attention to two lessons which are to be learnt from it.

1. Samuel was still a child when this message from God came to him; all his conduct in the matter is that of a child. We may learn from this that even children need not be ignorant of God and of God's will, but that, if they are willing to learn, God is willing to teach them. In this way Samuel is an example of early piety.

2. But early piety is sometimes supposed to mean, even by those who ought to know better, that it is the duty of a good child to rebuke whatever he thinks to be wrong in the conduct of those who are older than he is. So the child is likely to become forward and wilful. Samuel's case does not justify such conduct at all. For, in the first place, he was quite sure, which we cannot be, that the message he received, and the rebuke he conveyed, came from God, and that he had not made it up himself. And, in the second place, he did not intend to rebuke Eli, or even to tell him what he had been told by God, until Eli solemnly charged him to tell every word.

In these respects, then, we must try to follow Samuel's example, first, in being ready to listen to God's commands, which we read in the Bible and hear with the ears of our spirits; and, secondly, in being modest and humble enough not to judge or blame people who are older than ourselves.

LESSON 77.

Read 1 Samuel iv. 1—18.

WHEN the man of God came to Eli to rebuke him for his sinful indulgence of his two sons, words were spoken which seemed to foretell some great calamity, which was about to happen to the whole nation. The chapter which we have now read shows what that calamity was. The Philistines, against whom the people of Israel had to defend themselves in the time of Eli, were not quite new enemies, but they had never before had so much power as at that time. Their name, 'Philistines,' means strangers or immigrants, and the first notice of them in the Bible is of the time of Abraham. It is supposed that it was about Abraham's time that they settled in the towns near the sea, on the south-west of Palestine. There it was that they established themselves and grew strong. The Philistines were the people against whom Samson fought, but after his death they regained their strength,

and for many years after the time that we have just read about they were the strongest nation in Palestine; they were so strong that they oppressed the Israelites very much, almost to the time of David.

In the first battle the Philistines gained the advantage over the Israelites, but their victory was not so complete as to make the Israelites despair of regaining their position in a second battle. To make what they believed would be the best preparation for the second battle they resolved to send to Shiloh and have the Ark of God, the most sacred treasure they possessed, brought into the field. The motive which suggested this course of action cannot be called a religious motive; it was an act of superstition. The people did not really care to have the blessing of God, but they thought that the mere presence of the Ark in their camp would enable them to overcome their enemies.

The same kind of thing has often been repeated since then; one instance will suffice. When William, Duke of Normandy, invaded England, he had a consecrated banner, and wore a ring which was said to contain a very holy relic; the possession of these holy things was believed by his soldiers to ensure his success.

The Philistines were just as superstitious as the Israelites; but they spoke out their thoughts more honestly. Instead of saying that the Ark of God, that is, something dedicated to God, was come into the camp of the Hebrews, they said that the God of the Hebrews was come to help them. The reason that they gave for their fears is a mixture of truth and error; they acknowledged the power of the God of Israel, and spoke of the plagues which had been sent upon the Egyptians; but they said gods instead of God, and evidently believed that the plagues had been sent upon the Egyptians in the wilderness, not in Egypt. However they resolved, most wisely, to do the best they could, and to fight like men.

The battle on the next day showed how vain was the hope of the Israelites that the presence of the Ark of God without their own prayers for God's blessing would do them any good. The Israelite army was entirely defeated, and, worst of all, the Ark of God fell into the hands of the heathen Philistines. Such a terrible blow had never before fallen on the Israelites; it seemed to them as if their many sins against God were repaid to them by God's forsaking them. They lost heart entirely, and became servants, that is, subjects, to the princes of the Philistines.

We are told what was the effect of the news of this great defeat upon the aged Eli, and we may judge from that what sorrow it caused to many other good men throughout the land, Eli was

sitting by the gate at Shiloh, the place where he would be certain to get all the news from the army as soon as possible. A messenger came, and told him of the defeat of the Israelites, of the death of his two sons, and the loss of the Ark of God. The last sad news was more than he could bear. He fell backward from his seat, and died there at the gate of the town. On the same day a grandson was born to Eli, and was named by his dying mother, 'Ichabod,' meaning 'the glory is departed.' The glory to which she referred was the glory or light which shone over the Ark, and which was a symbol of God's presence and protecting care.

In the Philistine territory the Ark was carried about from place to place for some time, and was at last sent back to the Israelites. It was not, however, restored to Shiloh; the sanctuary there seems to have been laid waste, and never consecrated again.

In later Hebrew history, until another event occurred which was even more disastrous, this loss of the Ark was called the 'Captivity,' and is referred to by that name in several of the Psalms—for example, in the sixty-eighth and the seventy-eighth. Of the latter Psalm we will read a few verses.

'He (God) forsook the *tabernacle of Shiloh*, the tent which He placed among men: and delivered His strength into *captivity*, and His *glory* into the enemy's hand. . . . Their *priests* fell by the sword; and their *widows* made no lamentation.'—Psalm lxxviii. 60, 61, 64.

LESSON 78.

Read 1 Samuel vii.

SAMUEL was too young to take any active part in the events described in our last lesson. The chapter which we have now read shows him to us as a man, the interval between his boyhood and manhood being passed over in one short sentence, 'The time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.' The Judge of Israel generally, if not always, began his work as Judge by delivering the people from some enemy; he was first a leader in war, and then ruler in peace. We find now that Samuel was not an exception to the rule. This chapter, which tells us of what is, so far as we know, the only military action of Samuel, tells us also that Samuel became the Judge of the people. If, however, we remark only that Samuel gathered the people together, and that, acting under his advice, they conquered the Philistines who had oppressed them so long, we shall be passing by the moral of the whole account. Before the battle was fought with the Philistines, the Israelites had fought a battle with themselves and gained it.

When we were considering the battles in which Israel was

defeated, and the Ark of God was taken, no mention was made of the great cause of these defeats. But what we have now read throws back a light upon that subject, for it shows us that the real reason of those calamities was the same as that of many former sufferings, namely, that the people had fallen into idolatry. How can we know that? In the 3rd and 4th verses of this chapter Samuel tells the people that if they really mean to serve God they must turn to Him with all their hearts, and must put away their false Gods, and that then, and not till then, God will deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines. So the people put away Baalim and Ashtaroath, the false gods which they had been worshipping, and showed their sorrow for their past disobedience by saying, 'We have sinned against the Lord.' They used a ceremony which was very simple, but very expressive; they drew water and poured it out before the Lord, as a symbol of their desire to have their sins washed away from them.

The Philistines were still masters of the land, and heard all that was going on; they knew that the Israelites were collected in Mizpeh, and therefore resolved to attack them again and scatter them. The Israelites heard of their advance and were afraid; they had been in subjection so long that they could scarcely hope to be free. Samuel, as prophet—that is, messenger of God, appointed to declare God's will to men—offered a sacrifice, and 'cried unto the Lord.' This expression is often used of Samuel, and shows us one source of Samuel's strength. He was a man of prayer. His prayers to God, and the blessings which were given to Israel in answer to his prayers, were long remembered by the people. In the 99th Psalm, which is believed to have been written at least 300 years after, Samuel is named in a very remarkable manner. The verse runs thus:—'*Moses and Aaron among His (God's) priests, and Samuel among such as call upon His name; they called upon the Lord and He heard them.*'

The victory over the Philistines which followed was believed by Samuel himself and by the people to be an answer to Samuel's prayers, and a memorial of it was kept in the name of the place, 'Eben-ezer'—'*the stone of (God's) help.*' Not only were the people of Israel delivered from the immediate oppressions of the Philistines, but they were able to recover also those cities which in the preceding time of trouble had been taken away from them. Then began Samuel's judgeship, which was evidently more like a regular and acknowledged rule than that of any who had gone before him. He made journeys every year to certain fixed places, where we are told he '*judged Israel.*' Even the name '*circuit*' which we use now to describe the passing of English judges from place to place, to secure justice to men in all parts of the country, is used to

describe Samuel's progresses. Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh were what we may call the provincial centres, and Ramah, where Samuel resided, was the capital.

These facts show that the time of disorder, when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, was nearly at an end, and that already preparation was being made for the great change, of which we shall soon read the history.

LESSON 79.

Read 1 Samuel viii.

By a strange repetition of events, Samuel, in his old age, lost a great part of his influence over the Israelites, from a cause almost exactly the same with that which had destroyed the authority of Eli, and had finally led to the ruin of his family. The indication in the last lesson of a more settled form of government under Samuel than under the earlier Judges is made more marked by what we are told at the beginning of this chapter. Samuel's age, we may very reasonably infer, prevented his continuing those journeys in circuit from place to place, of which we read in the last lesson, and he tried to supply the want of his own presence by making his sons judges, and establishing them in Beersheba, that they might rule over the southern parts of the country. If they had been men of the same character as Samuel himself was, the arrangement would have been both pleasing and beneficial to the Israelites. But they were wanting in the chief requisite of judges; they were not true and just men; they wanted to exercise their office so as to make money for themselves (that is what is meant by the words, 'they turned aside after lucre'); and so they received bribes or presents, and perverted judgment by giving decisions contrary to justice in favour of those who gave them the presents. Of course, such a state of things was far worse than having no judges at all; disobedience to a law, when we confess the authority of the law, is much more injurious, both to private persons and to a nation at large, than being left to do altogether that which seems good in our own eyes.

The elders, or chief men, of Israel came to Ramah to Samuel, and, making first a formal complaint of the unjust conduct of his sons, asked him to appoint a king to rule over the whole land. It is clear that they still acknowledged that their obedience was due to Samuel, for they did not attempt to move in the matter of choosing a king except with his authority and under his direction. It is quite easy to understand how the request which the elders of Israel made to Samuel must have seemed to them the most natural and fitting that they could make; and it is not very difficult to under-

stand how deeply it must have grieved Samuel. At a time when any great change is proposed, such feelings nearly always exist on the part both of those who propose and those who resist the change. Those who are attached to the old methods, and they are generally the older men, argue that, from the very fact of the old order having lasted a long time and having done good service to the nation, the old way must be good. The advocates of change, when they are reasonable men, do not deny the good that there is or has been in the old, but say that the new is better.

In the case that we are considering now there are two circumstances which must have increased the difficulty. Samuel, during the years that he had been Judge, had raised the nation from a state of slavery and disunion to that of freedom and unity. His rule had bound the people together as they had not been bound since the time of Joshua. The proposal to adopt a new system in the place of that which had done so much good must therefore have seemed to him an indication of ingratitude on the part of those for whom he had done so much. Besides this, he remembered that the constitution of the nation, as settled by Moses under the direction of God, did not provide for the appointment of a king, and therefore the wish for a king appeared to him a wicked wish, arguing a disregard for the commands of God on the part of those who urged it.

If we had been living at the time, it would have been very hard for any of us to decide which of the two parties was right; but as we look back upon the history, we can discover that both the rule of the Judges and that of the Kings were parts of God's method for training the Israelites. Both the old way and the new were appointed by Him, and each was the best for its own time. One of our living poets, Tennyson, puts the truth on both sides in words which are very beautiful and easy to remember. He says:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

The description of the doings of a king which Samuel set forth in his speech to the Israelites, in the hope of inducing them to withdraw their request, is not at all exaggerated. Even to this day, in some eastern countries a king can do whatever he pleases. If the will of the king in such countries is good, he is a good king; if it is bad, he is a bad and oppressive king; his will alone, without the consent of his subjects, is sufficient to make new laws or alter old ones.

The Israelites listened, but were not convinced; and at length Samuel sent them away to their homes, leaving the matter still undecided.

LESSON 80.

The Establishment of the Kingdom and Election of Saul. (Epitome.)

AFTER the chapter which we read last there follow two or three which must be condensed into one lesson. They are important as a connecting link between the history of the Judges and the Kings; but we cannot read them now at full length. The history begins by telling us of the adventures of a young man of the tribe of Benjamin, whose name was Saul, and who had been sent by his father, Kish, to search for some asses which had gone astray. We should by no means expect to find that such an accident was the turning-point of Saul's life, and of the history of his nation; but so it was. In his search for the asses, Saul came, with his servant, near to the place where Samuel lived. Both Saul and his servant had heard of Samuel as a prophet: they knew that he had more knowledge than other men, and they believed that it was God who gave him that knowledge. If he knew matters which were hidden from other men, perhaps (so they said to each other) he might help them in their search, and tell them in which direction they ought to go. They went, therefore, to Samuel, but already, before they came to him, a secret message from God had come to Samuel, bidding him to anoint the young man Saul to be king over the people, and to be their captain to deliver them from the Philistines, who were again beginning to oppress them. When Saul met Samuel, the young man was soon convinced that the old prophet had more than ordinary knowledge even of ordinary things. He told Saul not to set his mind upon the asses, for they were already found, and then astonished him by saying that the desire of Israel was fixed on him. The meaning of the words was plain to Saul; but still he could not believe their truth. He objected that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of all the tribes, and that his father's family was not one of the chief even of that small tribe—'Wherefore, then,' said he, 'speakest thou so to me?' But Samuel, without any further explanation, took him into his house, and set him in the place of honour at a feast which had been prepared. On the next day, before allowing his guest to depart, Samuel took him aside, and poured a vial of oil upon his head and kissed him, saying, 'Is it not'—that is, 'Have not I done this'—'because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?' Then, with some last words of counsel, and giving him some signs, by the fulfilment of which Saul might be assured of the truth of what had been told him, he let him go away to his father's house. Saul's mind was full of what he had heard, and as

the signs were fulfilled one after another, he became gradually convinced that the message of Samuel was true. Still, perhaps because his thoughts were so busily employed, he said nothing to any of his friends about the anointing or the promise of the kingdom.

We often find this part of Saul's history referred to, as an example of the strange way in which events are made to depend upon each other. Saul, we are often told, is not the only man, who has gone out to seek his father's asses, and has ended by finding a kingdom. What is meant by this expression is, that often it happens that in the discharge of what seems a very simple duty, we find ourselves called to undertake a duty, and to receive an honour, greater than we ever thought could be ours.

Samuel, of course, could not be silent. It was his business to make public proclamation of the establishment of the kingdom. This he did, as if he were then beginning from the beginning: the people were called together, and lots were drawn to decide who should be king. First, of the tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen; then the family of Matri in that tribe; and lastly Saul, one of the members of that family. When Saul was brought forward, Samuel presented him to the people, saying, 'See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?' And the people confirmed the choice, by the shout, heard then for the first time, 'God save the King!'

Samuel then told the people 'the manner of the kingdom'—explained to them the constitution, is the modern phrase—and wrote it in a book, and let the people depart.

There were some, however, who, though they had wanted a king, were not satisfied with *the* king when he was appointed, and Saul wisely kept himself quiet, not attempting to force his authority upon the people, but resolving to wait his time. Soon there occurred an opportunity for finding out who would be faithful to him: the king of one of the heathen tribes east of the river Jordan, attacked one of the Israelite towns, and was nearly making himself master of it. But the terms which he proposed were so harsh that the men of the town asked for time to consider, and to find out whether they could get help from their brother Israelites. They sent a messenger to Saul, who at once summoned all the fighting-men of Israel to join him in attacking the Ammonites and relieving the town. A large number came to him and put themselves under his command. With them he marched to the town which was in danger, reached it just before the truce was at an end, fell upon the besiegers and completely defeated them.

The promptitude and energy of his action convinced the people, including even those who had said that they would not have him

to rule over them, that he was such a man as they had wanted and asked for. Therefore they all met at Gilgal, which place, having been the site of Joshua's first settled camp, seemed fit for the purpose of a formal proclamation of the kingdom: they renewed the kingdom, and 'made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal;' 'and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.'

LESSON 81.

Read 1 Samuel xii.

WHEN Saul had been accepted as king by all the people in the manner described in the last lesson, the time was come when Samuel might publicly resign the office of Judge, which he had held so long. Another ruler was appointed and acknowledged, therefore his rule was no longer necessary. But there was a part of his authority which he could not transfer or hand over to the new king. He was still, and to the end of his life he continued to be, the prophet; that is to say, although he gave up to Saul all the civil and military authority which had belonged to him, he continued to be the chief religious adviser and director of the people. This fact must be remembered, for it was as prophet that Samuel made the great speech to all the Israelites which we have just read. At the very beginning we find him expressing the greatest reverence for the king whom he himself had been instrumental in appointing; he calls him 'the anointed of the Lord,' and evidently regards him as the highest human judge of right or wrong in conduct.

There is something extremely beautiful and pathetic in the words which Samuel uses. He tells the people, and they would all know the truth of his words, that he was old and grey-headed, and seems to wish them to feel that he had grown grey in their service; he had walked before them from his childhood to that day. Indeed there was not a man living whose life had been more open and public than his had been, for when he was quite a child he ministered in the Tabernacle, the place to which the people all had access. His own sense of his uprightness in intention and in conduct must have been very strong to enable him to appeal so fearlessly to the people to bear witness to every deed of his past life; and his conscience must have been pure, or he would not have made this appeal as before God. There was, however, no pride of his doings in this speech, nothing at all inconsistent with true humility. Sometimes a man likes to talk about himself, to make other people think how great and good he is; but that was not Samuel's way. One great part of his public work was done, and he asked those who had been his subjects to complain if they had any cause of complaint, whether on the ground of injustice or of hardness. No complaint was made,

and the old prophet continued his address. As Joshua, just before his death, when the condition of the people was about to be greatly altered, had addressed them, recalling to their memories the great things that God had done for their forefathers, so Samuel, at a more important crisis of the national history, resolved to 'reason with' them 'concerning the righteous acts of the Lord.' From what he said we learn why it was that he, as God's prophet, had been so deeply grieved when first the people asked for a king. He shows how every act of distrust of God, and of disobedience to His commandments, had brought trouble upon them, and how, whenever they had repented and turned again to God, He had sent deliverance to them by the hand of some man to whom He gave strength for that purpose. The fault of the Israelites, therefore, in Samuel's opinion, was distrust of God's providence. But since they had desired and resolved to have a king, since they had accepted Saul, and promised obedience to him, the new mode of government might display the mode of God's working as much as the old had done. Having a king would be a good thing if the people were willing to serve God; but if they or their king disobeyed God's laws, nothing in their new form of government could prevent their suffering the consequence. No change of government could alter the great law, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.'

The time of year when these events took place was the season of harvest, which in Palestine is generally a season of fine and clear weather; but at the conclusion of Samuel's speech a remarkably violent thunderstorm came on, which the people believed to be a sign of God's displeasure at their conduct.

The solemn speech, and the unusual occurrence of a storm, impressed the Israelites very much, and they almost wished, while the impression was fresh upon them, to give up the king they had not long before so earnestly asked for. But Samuel told them that that could not be; the past was past and done; only let them remember the lessons of the past, and never again be guilty of like want of faith. Still, there seems to have been something like a presentiment of evil in Samuel's mind; the last words he spoke are tinged with sorrow rather than with expectation of gladness: 'If ye shall still do wickedly,' he says to them, 'ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.'

LESSON 82.

Read 1 Samuel xvi. 1—13.

THE sorrowful forebodings with which Samuel ended his last address to the whole nation of Israel were sorrowfully fulfilled. Saul began his reign well and wisely, but very soon he forgot that his position was that of king under the Great King, the God of

Israel. Several times he disobeyed commands which were sent to him from God by the mouth of Samuel, and the punishment for his disobedience was announced to him sadly and yet sternly. Samuel was commanded to tell him that the kingdom should not descend to his son, but that another man should be appointed, who would obey God's laws. The fault of Saul which was the cause of all his evil deeds was self-will: he was brave in war, and, so far as we can find out, wise and sagacious in peace; but he never thought whether a purpose on which he had set his mind was right or wrong: he wished to do it, and therefore he would do it. Saul's life is a remarkable example of a life which might have been honourable and honoured, but which was spoilt and wasted by self-will. We may say that we are not, and never shall be, in so high a position as Saul was, and may, perhaps, fancy that it will not so much matter if we indulge our own desires. But our lives, the truth and the purity of our souls, are quite as much to us as Saul's was to him. He could do no more than waste his life, and, if we act as he did, we shall do no less. Obedience to as much as we can learn of the law of God, and kind, brotherly regard for our fellows, are required of all of us as much as of any king. Let us read a passage from a book by Thomas Carlyle, in which he shows how the same faults lead to the same consequences, in kings and in private men. He 'was a ruler; but art not thou also one? His wide' kingdom, 'look at it from the fixed stars, is no wider than thy narrow brickfield, where thou too didst faithfully, or didst unfaithfully. Man, it is not thy works, which are all mortal, but only the spirit thou workest in, that can have worth or continuance.' Our every-day duties may be done well, and bring us a rich blessing, or badly done or left undone, and lead us to destruction.

We shall not now follow in any detail the acts of Saul which led to his rejection: the story would be too long for these lessons, and Saul, with all his faults, was too great a man for us to speak lightly of him even in his fall. There must have been a great nobleness in him, or Samuel would not have mourned for his errors, and for the punishment which followed them, so long and so deeply as he did.

The passage of Scripture which we have just read is our introduction to the man who was to be Saul's successor. We shall hear more of David's early shepherd-life when we come to the Psalms, or songs of praise and prayers, many of which he wrote. Before going on, let us observe one thing. This anointing of David as the future king of Israel was not intended to be the beginning of a revolution. So long as Saul lived, the obedience of the people, and of David among them, was due to him, and we

shall find, as we go on, that David at all events never forgot this.

But the lesson upon which we now must dwell most particularly, is that which is conveyed in the words of the seventh verse of the chapter which we have just read. 'Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.' This is one of the principal truths of religion, and is expressed, as many such truths are in the Bible, in words so plain and so few that we can scarcely fail to understand or remember them. We must not think that we know all about our fellow-men: we can only know their outward actions and can never be sure that we fully understand the motives or wishes which came before and caused the actions. For we are not as God: He alone knows or can know our hearts, our secret thoughts and wishes.

LESSON 83.

Read 1 Samuel xvii. 1-54.

THE passage of Scripture which we have just read is very interesting, but does not require much comment, except on one or two points. We, who read of battles in which large armies, composed of many thousands of men, meet each other, and begin to fight at a distance, using cannons and rifles, and at last, when they do come close together, charge upon each other in great numbers, can hardly understand how it happened that two armies were encamped within a short distance of each other for many days, and yet did not fight. Our surprise is made greater when we find out that the cause of the delay was the presence in one of those armies of one man whom no single man in the ranks of his enemies was willing or able to fight with. In very ancient times, however, such a delay as we have read about, and such a challenge as we find the giant offering to the Israelites, were very common. In the history of Rome we read of a case very similar, only that the general of the Roman army would not allow any of his men to go out of the ranks to engage in the combat. In the same history there is another case in which three men were chosen out of each army, and it was agreed beforehand that the side to which the victorious three belonged should be considered to have gained the day without any more fighting. It surprises us to find people whom we consider stern and cruel so desirous to avoid needless bloodshed, and we wish sometimes that some such method could be acted upon now.

Another thing which requires explanation is the conduct of the Israelites after David had killed Goliath. Why was it that they were not satisfied with the death of Goliath? Why did they pursue and kill as many as they could of the army of the Philistines?

The answer is plain: they had made no agreement with the Philistines on the matter. The Philistines had invaded the territory of the Israelites without any just cause, and were confident that they would be able to reduce the Israelites to slavery. It was no part of the duty of Saul and his men to promise to give up their land and themselves to foreign invaders, even if the invaders were at first victorious, and therefore they used their advantage, and were justified in using it, to the utmost, to make their own land free, and to inflict such chastisement upon their enemies as would prevent a repetition of the invasion.

But now let us consider the conduct of David, before and during his fight with the giant. He showed no sign of fear, although he was quite a youth, and Goliath, besides his size and strength, had the advantage of being a skilful warrior, used to arms from his youth. The often-quoted words, 'Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,' apply very forcibly to David. But he had something more than a just quarrel; he had trust in God, and knew that God would help him to fight and to conquer the giant. The contrast between David's sling and stone and all the brazen armour of the Philistine champion makes this faith of David more conspicuous. But what did other people think of David's conduct? His eldest brother thought that he had come merely for the sake of seeing the battle, and called him proud. Saul, who was himself a brave man, and knew a brave man when he saw him, still thought the difference between the shepherd-boy and the giant warrior too great for a fair fight between them. Therefore he wanted David to put on armour. David tried the armour, but found it too heavy and cumbersome; he could not move in it, because he was not accustomed to wear armour, but would go out just as he was. Both Eliab and Saul looked at the outward appearance only, not at the heart. They could see, and nobody could help seeing, that David was a mere boy, but they did not know what courage he had, nor how strong he was made by the faith and trust in God which filled his heart.

Lastly, there is a moral to be drawn from this story, which is very valuable for us all. We are not called upon to go and fight with giants; but we do often need to fight against wrong and wickedness, and we are too often afraid of attacking the wrong, because it is so great. Prudence, in such a case, becomes cowardice. Size and strength did not, after all, give Goliath so much power as David's faith in God gave to him. If we have the right on our side we have something, or, to speak more correctly, some One whom the wrong, however powerful it may appear, cannot resist. 'God defend the right!' is the speech which has often encouraged soldiers in fighting; let us take it as our encouragement in our battle, for soldiers we are all bound to be, for the Right and Just and True.

LESSON 84.

Read 1 Samuel xvii. 55—xviii. 16.

THERE is a little difficulty about the arrangement of the narrative of the relations between Saul and David, of which two explanations have been given. In the latter part of the sixteenth chapter of this book it is recorded that David had been sent for from Bethlehem to play upon the harp before Saul, who was afflicted with some form of melancholy madness; and then, at the end of the seventeenth chapter, it is said that, when David went out to attack the Philistine giant, Saul did not know who he was. That is the difficulty, and the explanations are these:—1. The history in the Books of Samuel was put together from various documents and traditions, and in this part—owing, it may be, to the carelessness of those whose duty it was to copy the documents—the right order has been lost. Or, 2. The stay of David with Saul was very short, and had occurred some time before, so that, taking account of the change in his appearance which even a year would make at his age, Saul may well have failed to recognise him.

The passage of Scripture which we have read to-day relates what we may call the beginning of David's public life. He had come from the sheepfolds to the field of battle in the valley of Elah, and had won the victory over Goliath with his shepherd's weapons, dressed in his shepherd's clothes. But, when the fight was over, there was no man in the army who was treated with so much respect as the poor shepherd-boy. The story of the friendship between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul, and generally regarded as the heir to Saul's kingdom, which began upon the field of battle, is one of the most beautiful of the stories which the Books of Samuel contain. Of course, Jonathan knew nothing of the ceremony which had taken place at Bethlehem, when Samuel had poured the oil upon David's head, anointing him as the future king of Israel; but even when he did come to know all about it, there was not the least falling-off in his love for his friend, to whom, as we read, his soul was knit, and whom he loved as his own soul.

The present which Jonathan made to David, of a complete suit of clothes, which seems strange to us, was quite in accordance with the habits of Eastern people. Even to this day, if a king or a great man in the East wishes to show his esteem for a friend, or to do him special honour, bestowing on him a robe which he himself has worn, or, at least, one from his treasury, is the method usually observed. In a time and in countries where money is not very plentiful, and where fashions are not constantly changing, such a gift is more thought of than it would be with us.

Saul was at first quite as willing as his son Jonathan to do honour to the brave young David, who had delivered his country from the Philistines; but Saul's mind had begun to fail, and he could not always control his temper. The self-will which he had shown early in his reign deepened and darkened into madness. One form in which his madness was displayed was jealousy of any person whom he heard praised. This dreadful feeling was aroused in Saul by the song which the Hebrew women sang when they welcomed home the victorious army. They acknowledged Saul's bravery, but they put David before him, because David alone had been courageous enough to face the great Goliath, and, by conquering him, had defeated the whole army of the Philistines. 'Saul eyed David,' we are told, 'from that day and forward.' The word 'eyed' means simply 'was jealous of' David. From the words which he spoke in his jealous madness, we gather that he had already a suspicion that David was the man of whom Samuel had spoken, when he had said that the kingdom should be given to another, and not to Saul's son.

With that thought in his mind, Saul could not be quite friendly with David; he was obliged, by his former solemn promise, to make David his son-in-law, and to give him a place among the chief men of the land; but, every now and then, his fury became so great that he even attempted to take away David's life. The remainder of Saul's history is very painful to read, and difficult to understand: we may pass it over briefly. It is hard to find out which of his evil deeds were caused by wickedness, and which were the result of madness; but that madness itself was the result of ungoverned self-will, so that we cannot say that Saul was not guilty, even when he did not exactly know what he was doing. His bravery was undoubted, his strength and beauty were unequalled among his people, and he might have been a good and noble king; but the one fault of self-will produced in him, as it has done since in many others, a multitude of other faults, so that in the end his life was wasted, and his death generally unlamented.

LESSON 85.

Read 1 Samuel xx.

WE have passed over two or three of those chapters which tell us of Saul's jealousy and hatred of David. Before, however, we commence any examination of the chapter which we have just read, we must just glance at one or two facts related in the chapters which we have omitted.

Saul gave his younger daughter, Michal, in marriage to David, but even in planning that marriage he made David perform some feats

of war, which exposed him to great danger from the Philistines. After the marriage, Saul urged his son Jonathan to kill David, but Jonathan argued so wisely with him that he abandoned the attempt, and even made a solemn promise that David's life should be spared. Soon after he had made this promise he forgot it; once he tried to kill David with his own hand, and once he sent soldiers to slay him. David was in such danger that he was obliged to run away; his escape was accomplished by the help of his young wife, Michal, whom he had to leave, and whom he did not see again for many years. As was most natural, Samuel was the person whose protection David sought, and he was dwelling with Samuel at Naioth in Ramah (or 'in the pastures of Ramah') when Saul, hearing where he was, came to seek him. He escaped a second time, and went back to the court, where he met his friend Jonathan, and conversed with him in the words we have just read.

Both David and Jonathan were deeply in earnest in their conversation, and the words of both of them are almost as noble as any we can read. The fulness of their trust in each other seems to be the point which is most to be considered. David begins by putting himself entirely into the power of his friend. He knows and says that he has done no evil to Saul, or to any of his family, and yet he is sure that Saul has determined to kill him. 'Let me not be given up to Saul; slay me yourself if you believe I have broken the bond made between us'—in these words we may sum up his address to Jonathan. Jonathan's reply is as unreserved. He calls God to witness to the purity of his intentions, and promises David to let him know all that he can discover of his father's plans. Then, for the first time, as it seems, he lets his friend understand that he knows that, on Saul's death, David, and not he himself, will be king. Still he desires David to promise that he will continue his friendship, not only to himself, but to his children when he shall be dead. They then repeat their solemn promises to each other, because each loves the other even as his own life.

A plan was devised between the two friends before they separated, by which the information which Jonathan could gather might be conveyed to David without any personal meeting between them.

Saul in the meantime returned to his home, and three days passed, during which Jonathan was trying to discover whether his father was disposed to welcome or wished to destroy David. At last he was quite sure that he could take no good news to his friend; for, in one of his fits of fury, Saul made an attempt to slay Jonathan, his own son, because he had spoken kindly of David.

The next morning Jonathan went out to shoot with bow and arrows, and used certain words by which David, who was concealed

near the place, could understand that he might not return to the presence of Saul, or that, if he did, it was at the risk of his life. When the message had thus been conveyed, Jonathan sent away the lad who was in attendance on him to pick up his arrows when he shot at a mark, and waited for David to come out of his hiding-place.

The word 'artillery,' which occurs in the 40th verse, formerly meant any preparation for war, and is used there of Jonathan's bow and arrows; now it is used only of one kind of preparation for war, viz., cannons or heavy guns.

The account of the parting between the two friends, which both of them believed was a last parting, is one of those parts of Scripture which we can best understand by having experienced something like it ourselves. The trust that they have in each other shows itself still in the last words which Jonathan speaks. David must henceforth be an enemy to his father, but still the two young men must be friends. Wherever they go, or whatever they do, they must still remember that the promise made in the presence of the Lord is between them. To God's care, therefore, they committed each other, and went their respective ways.

LESSON 86.

Read 1 Samuel xxiv.

WHEN David went away from the city where Saul lived, knowing that Saul would kill him as soon as he found an opportunity, there was only one course open to him. He could not return to Bethlehem and become a shepherd again, for there Saul would certainly seek for him; nor could he remain in any of the settled parts of the country. At first he fled to one of the kings of the Philistines, but found that his position was full of peril. The princes of the Philistines remembered that he had killed their great champion, Goliath, and would have taken their revenge upon him had he not feigned madness, and so contrived to escape. Gath, therefore, was no place of safety, but in the south of Palestine there were many districts which were not thickly peopled, and which were constantly exposed to the invasions of bands of the wild robber-tribes which dwelt to the south and east of the Hebrews. In such districts he would be free from the jealousy of the Philistines, he might expect to escape the pursuit of Saul, and might perhaps do some good still to his country by preventing the inroads of the robbers, if only he could get some followers on whose loyalty and bravery he could depend. Such followers he soon found. David was not the only man whom Saul had wronged and oppressed; there were many who were in distress, and in debt, and discontented.

These were gathered to David, and he became captain over them, fixing his head-quarters at the cave of Adullam, in the hills overlooking the western shore of the Dead Sea.

This is the commencement of the second part of David's life. He was not only himself an outlaw, fleeing from the king's wrath, but he was the commander of a band of men who were probably ready for any kind of desperate enterprise. Such a thing could happen only in a very rude state of society, and even then would be justified only by the sorest compulsion; but perhaps there never was a captain of outlaws who contrived to get his men under such control as David did. The harm he might have done is the real measure of his self-control. Men in similar circumstances have usually been quite regardless of law and order, but David's little army seems to have been a centre of order and good government. David had at first hard work to do, we may be sure, but by degrees he gained such confidence from all that his presence, instead of being feared, was sought after by those who were settled in the country near his usual haunts.

The passage chosen for our reading to-day shows most clearly the nobleness and chivalry of David's character at this time of his life, and shows, also, how that nobleness influenced others. The majority of the people who were in the secret of David's movements were friendly to him; but some were treacherous, and for the sake of the reward which they hoped to get from the king, they told him where he might find the man he desired to kill. More than once David was in great danger from such treachery. At last a time came when the king fell into his power. David and his men were hidden in one of the caves with which the hills of Southern Palestine abound, when Saul entered the cave alone. From the dark part of the cave David and his men could see him, themselves remaining unseen. The outlaws desired to finish the work at once by the murder of Saul; and even if David had yielded to them, perhaps it would have been hard to blame him. However, he controlled not only his men, but his own spirit. He did no harm to Saul, but secretly cut off a part of his robe, and let him go away in ignorance of the presence of his foe. When he had left the cave, David went out and called after him. David's words were those of a man who felt himself unjustly suspected; but his deeds were a stronger proof of his innocence. It is pleasant, indeed, to find that, mad and bad as Saul had been, such nobleness and generosity had an effect upon him. The madness and suspicion which had clouded his mind rolled away for a little time at least, and he spoke with something of his old frankness. At last he had found that it was useless to try to put an end to the life of a man for whom God had appointed the high destiny of being King of Israel. He humbled

himself before the captain of the band of outlaws, and asked his pardon for the harm he had intended to do to him. Even affection was reawakened, as appears by his calling David 'My son.'

This touching incident may be taken as an illustration of a truth, of which we may find many other examples in history and in common life. A man is seldom so sunk in selfishness or brutality but that his gratitude is awakened when he is made the subject of a generous and noble action; and when once gratitude is called forth, there is some hope that other lost or forgotten virtues may follow after it.

LESSON 87.

The End of Saul's Reign.

DAVID had had too much experience of the changeableness of Saul's disposition, and of the fury which possessed him when his fits of madness came upon him, to be at all willing to leave the security of his dwelling in the caves. Once, it seems, he did visit the more settled part of the country, but it was only to join in the mourning of the people at the death of Samuel, and as soon as the public lamentations were over he returned to his rocky fastnesses. There, for a long time, David and his men lived the free life which has already been described, defending the Israelite inhabitants of the district and their goods, from the attacks of robbers, and receiving, from those whom they defended, presents of food. One man, a very rich but very churlish sheep-master, named Nabal, refused to make any such present, and expressed his refusal in so threatening a way that David resolved to attack him. From the execution of this purpose, which, we need scarcely observe, was a wrong one, David was turned aside by the courteous and prudent intercession of Nabal's wife, Abigail. Within a few days, Nabal, who was a drunkard, drank himself to death, and David married his widow.

David's caution in not going home with Saul was soon proved to have been wise, for Saul came once more with an army to seek and destroy him. Once more Saul fell into David's hands, and once more he was spared. The guards, who were set around the place where Saul was sleeping one night, themselves fell asleep, and David, with one of his nephews, Abishai, descended into the camp, and came, without awaking any of the guards, till he stood by Saul. He could have taken Saul's life, but he would not; he took his spear, and a cruse of water that was near him, and went away to the hills. Then he called aloud to the chief captain of Saul's army and to the soldiers, and asked them why their watch had been so careless. Saul recognised David's voice, and was struck again with admiration of his goodness, and shame at his

own ill conduct towards him. He said, 'Return my son David: for I will no more do thee harm.' But David's conviction was only deepened that he would perish one day by the hand of Saul. He therefore resolved to leave the land over which Saul reigned, and to seek a home among the Philistines. At Gath, one of the Philistine cities, he was kindly received by Achish, the ruler, who gave him a city, Ziklag, for his habitation. The treachery and deceit by which David had so long been surrounded had infected David himself. While he was living at Ziklag, under the protection of the King of Gath, he used to go out with all his men, and attack some of the robber-tribes of the south, who were allies of the Philistines, but enemies of Israel: that, perhaps, was right and patriotic. But when he returned from these small wars he used to tell the Philistines that he had been attacking his own fellow-countrymen, and so make them think that he would never dare to return to the Israelites any more. One result of this deception was that the Philistines made up their minds to invade the dominions of Saul, and asked David and his men to join them. They consented, and all marched off together towards Gilboa, where Saul was collecting his army to meet them. How David would have got clear of the difficulties which his own deceit had caused—how he would have contrived to please the Philistines and yet to avoid fighting against his own countrymen, we cannot say. Fortunately he was spared the trouble; for some of the Philistine princes were either more shrewd or less trustful than Achish, and demanded David's dismissal. He went away to Ziklag, and when he came there, he found that he was wanted. Some of his old foes, the robbers of the south, had attacked the city, and burnt it, and carried away all the women, including David's two wives. He immediately pursued them, with more than half of his band of soldiers, and overtook them. Not expecting any attack, the robbers were enjoying themselves, eating and drinking and dancing, making merry because of the unusual success of their expedition. But David attacked them, and put them to utter rout, and rescued all the captives they had taken, besides recovering an immense quantity of booty which they had collected in their raids. Of the wealth that thus came into his possession David made prudent use, sending presents to the chief cities of Southern Palestine, and to the inhabitants of those districts in which he and his men had often been sheltered.

Meantime, towards the north of Palestine, sad events had occurred. Saul's evil deeds had made him despair of any help from God in the war with the Philistines, and therefore he had tried to get help from the spirits of the dead. That attempt was vain, and he met the Philistines in battle, determined to fight to

the last, and yet knowing that the fight was hopeless. At a critical period of the battle, Saul's eldest son, Jonathan, and two other of his sons, were slain, and he himself was seriously wounded. His death, like his life, was wilful. He felt that he could resist the Philistines no longer; yet he was determined not to yield to them. He took his own sword, and set it so that he could press hard against it, threw himself upon it, and died. This, suicide, was the sad end of the first King of Israel.

LESSON 88.

Read 2 Samuel i.

It was explained in the last lesson that when Saul was defeated by the Philistines, and died by his own hand on the battle-field, David was far away, fighting against the bands of robbers who had burnt the city where he dwelt. This chapter shows us how David received the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan. We have heard the history of the last of Saul's battles, and therefore we know that the story which the young Amalekite told to David was a made-up story. The only parts of it that were true were that Saul and Jonathan were dead, and that the Amalekite had taken the crown and the bracelet from Saul's body, and brought them to David. Everybody, it appears, knew by this time that the cause of Saul's hatred for David was his knowledge that David had been anointed by Samuel to succeed him as king. This evidently was the reason why the young man came to David, and told him the story of Saul's death. He knew that Saul hated David, and that he had tried many times to kill him, and he thought that David must have hated Saul in return, and would be glad to reward the man who had killed him. But he did not at all understand David's character. Twice had Saul been entirely in David's power, but he had been spared, because David would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed; he could not, therefore, be pleased at hearing that the great king had fallen so ingloriously by the hand of a stranger. The knowledge that the time was come when the promise made to him by Samuel was to be fulfilled did not prevent his feeling intense grief at the death of one who had been so mighty. Here, again, let us remark that there must have been something very noble and great about Saul, for David, whom he had so grievously wronged, wept and lamented over his death; and even the outlaws, who were with David, joined their captain in showing all the outward signs of the deepest grief.

It seems quite clear that David was deceived by the false story told by the Amalekite; he questioned him very carefully about it,

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and then ordered him, instead of being rewarded as he had expected, to be put to death.

At the end of the chapter we have just read there is a poem which David composed, most probably, immediately after the death of Saul and Jonathan. The eighteenth verse, which in our printed Bibles is enclosed in brackets, to show that it is put in between two verses to explain something, itself stands much in need of explanation. The words 'the use of' are printed in different letters from the rest of the verse; the intention of those who made the English translation in using these italic letters was to show that they had put in the words to make sense. Without those words the verse would read: 'Also he (David) bade them teach the children of Judah the bow.' And this makes excellent sense as it stands, if we accept the teaching of many great scholars, namely, that the whole song is called 'The Bow' or 'the Song of the Bow,' from the reference in it to the *bow* of Jonathan, who was accustomed to use that weapon. The meaning is that David composed the poem, and made the children of Judah learn it by heart.

We cannot now dwell upon all the beauties of the poem, although many of them are very conspicuous: we must be contented with a short outline of the subject.

First, in verses 19 and 20, the lament is raised for the defeat of all the Israelites, many of whom, and they the strongest and noblest, had fallen in the battle. Their death was a cause of grief to David, which would be the keener because the enemies of Israel would be greatly delighted.

Next, in verse 21, David expresses his anguish by cursing the place where so dreadful a calamity had occurred. He cannot bear to think that anyone should ever look upon the place with pleasure, and so he wishes that never dew nor rain may fall upon and refresh the spot.

Thirdly, in verses 22 and 23 he laments Saul and Jonathan together, showing how they had fought side by side, like friends rather than like father and son.

Fourthly, the 24th verse refers to Saul alone, the splendour of whose reign even the women of Israel had shared.

Lastly, in verses 25, 26, and 27, David laments, as a friend, for his friend Jonathan. The previous part of the poem would express the feelings of all loyal Israelites, but these verses are David's own: 'Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.'

The two great parts of the poem, the national and the personal part, are separated by the words, 'How are the mighty fallen,' which are a kind of refrain, occurring also at the beginning and the end of the song.

NOTE.—On two points treated in this lesson, views somewhat

different are held by some scholars. The explanations given above of the Amalekite's conduct, and of verse 18, 'the Bow,' are in agreement with authorities quoted in the 'Speaker's Commentary.' Dean Stanley, however ('Jewish Church,' Lecture xxi.), suggests (1) that the Amalekite did actually give the *mortal* stroke to Saul, whose attempt at suicide he supposes may have been unsuccessful; and (2) that David did teach the *use* of the bow to his fellow-tribesmen of Judah, in remembrance of his friend Jonathan's skill in archery.

LESSON 89.

The Beginning of David's Reign.

SAUL being dead, the Israelites were left without a ruler, and unfortunately were unable for some time to agree as to whom they should choose to be their king. The men of the tribe of Judah, one of the most numerous and influential of all, were in favour of David, but those of other tribes were still attached to the family of Saul. David inquired of the Lord whether he should go up into any of the cities of Judah, and received an answer bidding him go up to Hebron.

[Remember what we have learnt about the natural features of the land: the city Ziklag was in the plain near the Mediterranean Sea. Hebron was on the main ridge of hills running through the country from north to south.]

The men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. The first act of the new king was the sending of a message of thanks to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, who had rescued the dead bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the insults which the barbarous Philistines often practised upon their fallen foes. But David was king over only a very small part of the country. Abner, the captain of Saul's army, took one of his master's surviving sons and made him king over the remainder of the land. As a natural result, war arose between the followers of the rival kings. In the first skirmish Abner killed Asahel, one of King David's nephews, and so roused the hatred of two others, of whom we shall hear more hereafter—Joab and Abishai. As the war went on, the advantage was seen to be on the side of David. 'David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.' At length, the young Ishbosheth, Saul's son, gave such grievous offence to Abner, without whose help he could do nothing, that Abner resolved to leave him and take up the cause of David. He therefore began communications with the elders of all Israel, recommending them to submit themselves to David. After a while he himself went to

Hebron, where he was kindly received and feasted by David, and sent away again in peace. Joab and Abishai were not with their uncle when Abner came to him, but when they returned to Hebron and found that their enemy had been there and had departed in peace, they sent a message after him which induced him to return. The two crafty men met Abner as he came into the city and murdered him, in revenge for the death of their brother Asahel. David was greatly grieved at this treachery, but he was not yet strong enough to punish it. He solemnly cleared himself of the guilt of the murder, and honoured Abner with a great funeral. His own inability to punish the murderers, and his certainty that some day punishment would come upon them, are expressed in his own words: 'There is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel; and I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah (Joab and Abishai) are too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.' Once again, after this, David was exposed to harm by the evil action of men who thought they could best help him by murdering his foes. Two men, Rechab and Baanah, came upon Ishbosheth as he lay asleep in his house, and killed him, and took his head to David. But he refused to sanction their deed, and had them immediately put to death at Hebron. After these events, which extended over about seven years, the elders of all Israel came to Hebron and submitted themselves to David, who thus became king over all the land.

Up to this time Hebron had been the chief city in the south of Palestine. There was another city, much better situated for a capital, but it was still in the power of the ancient inhabitants, the Jebusites. This one mountain fortress had remained unconquered all through the time of Joshua and the Judges, through the reign of Saul, and through the early part of David's reign; but when David was established as king over all Israel, he attacked Jebus and took it, and either then or soon afterwards gave to it the name of Jerusalem, and made it the capital of his kingdom.

From Jerusalem David and his army went out against the Philistines, and by degrees subdued them altogether. It is to this part of David's life, very probably, that we may refer an action, the account of which is given, out of its place, in the 23rd chapter of this book: 'David was then in an hold (a strong or fortified place), and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate." And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless, he would not

drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" therefore he would not drink it.'

This beautiful and touching story almost gives its own explanation and moral. The longing of King David for water from the well, of which he must often have drunk when he was a shepherd-boy; the anxiety of his men to please him; their love for him, which led them to risk their lives to give him pleasure; and his thankfulness to them, mingled with something like shame at having by a word exposed them to the loss of their lives for his gratification—all these things put together make us feel that the story is true, and that David and his soldiers were men worth calling men, that they were heroes.

They had not been taught so fully as we have been taught the great virtue of self-sacrifice, but they practised it far more freely than many of us would be willing to do.

LESSON 90.

Read 2 Samuel vii.

WHEN David was established in the kingdom, one of his first cares was for the Ark of the Covenant of God. He wished to make Jerusalem not only the civil but also the religious capital of the land. From the time of Eli and Samuel the Ark of the Covenant had been treated with scant honour, but David had a feeling of reverence which Saul had not possessed, and wished that the Ark, and the priests who had the care of it, should be brought to his new city. This part of his wishes was accomplished. The Ark was brought to Jerusalem with the greatest joy on the part of David and all the people. And then there came into the heart of David the desire about which we have been reading to-day, namely, that he might be allowed to replace the tabernacle, or tent, which was made in such a manner that it could be taken down and carried from place to place, by a solid, immovable building.

There can be no doubt that this wish was a wise as well as a pious one. David was beginning to surround himself with something like kingly state: a palace had been built for him at Jerusalem, which was his home. The people came thither to him for his decision in all matters that required the exercise of his authority as monarch. It did not seem right to him that he should be made so glorious, while the Ark, which was the sign of the Covenant between the people of Israel and their heavenly King, was left in a tent, with no more honour than it had received when the people were wanderers in the wilderness. This was the source of David's

pious wish ; it was a wise wish also. It has often been proved that nothing keeps a people so much united as unity of religion. If they came to Jerusalem always for the observance of the great ordinances of their religion, and found those ordinances observed in a fixed building, they would certainly have much better hopes of the stability of the kingdom. Their worship of God and their reverence for the king would go together and strengthen each other.

The prophet Nathan, to whom David told his desire, thought that it was one which ought to be carried into execution, and recommended him to set about it at once. But Nathan soon found out that he had made a mistake; he had let his own feelings decide, instead of asking, as a prophet ought to ask, counsel of God. In a vision of the night knowledge came to Nathan which enabled him to see how the desire was right, and, at the same time, that it must not yet be fulfilled.

The words that came to Nathan in his dream or vision are some of them hard to understand, but the general meaning is tolerably clear. Nathan learnt, and was to teach David, that God's glory and honour were in no way dependent upon the beauty of the place in which He was worshipped. God's glory was shown in all the wonderful works that He had done for His people Israel in His leading them through the wilderness and subduing the people of Canaan before them ; in His delivering them again and again from their enemies in the time of the Judges ; and, not least, in His raising up David to such power and honour as he then enjoyed. It was God who had taken him from the sheep-cotes to be ruler over Israel. As to David's wish to build a house, a temple, for God ; first of all, let David learn that God would build him a house, that is to say, God would establish his family upon the throne. But David and those who should come after him must be sure that it was not for any special merit of theirs that they were chosen, and therefore, that if they should break God's laws, the punishment due to the breaking of law would be inflicted upon them. It would seem, and would be, natural punishment, 'the rod of men and the stripes of the children of men,' but it would, for all that, be God's action through natural agencies. David's desire, however, was so far accepted that Nathan was commanded to promise him a son who should build a temple or house for the name of God.

When this message had been delivered to David, he went in to the tent or Tabernacle, where the Ark was, and prayed before God.

The older we grow the more may we hope to learn of the wisdom and truth of such prayers as that which David offered. It does not appear that he asked *for* anything, except that he might know the truth of God's promises. One sentence of the prayer

must be very carefully noticed ; it is the 20th verse of the chapter : 'And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant.' This is in the true spirit of communion with God, and is the kind of prayer which is sure to strengthen and bless him who offers it. So also we realise what is the true purpose of prayer, namely, to purify and comfort our hearts by lifting them above their own natural weakness into spiritual union with the Almighty.

LESSON 91.

David's Great Sin.

THERE is much in the remaining story of David's life which is very sad. He committed some great sins and brought upon himself grievous affliction. He took for himself Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his bravest soldiers, and then gave such orders to Joab, the general of his army, as ensured Uriah's death. These deeds greatly displeased God, and He sent the prophet Nathan to awaken David's conscience, and to make known to him what was to be his punishment. The words in which Nathan delivered his message are very remarkable, and must be given exactly: 'And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him." And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." And Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the

sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house." And David said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

The meaning of this terrible sentence was that quarrels and fighting between members of David's own family should embitter the remainder of his days, and that the child of his wickedly-acquired wife should die while still a baby. We shall read hereafter how David's punishment was carried out, but, before doing so, let us consider what we may learn from the circumstances of his sins.

We must, in the first place, remember how many virtues David had, for it is in the contrast between his virtues and his sins that our lesson lies. We must remember his love of his country; how fearlessly he put himself forward to fight for it against Goliath, and how on many other occasions he showed his patriotism. We must remember his generous and forbearing conduct to Saul. We must bear in mind how just and considerate a king he usually was to his people. Above all, we must remember with what deep trust and fervent love he looked up to God. When we find a man so deeply religious, and generally so just and self-denying, falling into grievous sins, we may well stop to ask how such a thing could have happened. The explanation is that in later life David was exposed to quite new influences, and temptations of a very dangerous kind, against which he was not sufficiently on his guard. He had become a rich and mighty king, having almost uncontrolled power over his people. Now the possession of great riches, and, still more, the possession of great power, has a tendency to make those who possess them self-indulgent and wilful: that is, they are apt to do what they like, without considering whether what they like to do is right or wrong. Under these dangerous influences many men's characters change so gradually, that they themselves are scarcely conscious of the change. They grow more and more wilful, until in a moment of passion or impulse they commit some great sin, which often drags them into others worse and more deliberate. Thus David had become exposed to strong temptations by his great rise in life.

Now few men are exposed to the dangers to character which arise from the possession of great wealth and power; nevertheless David's story is a warning to us all, for all men are exposed to moral temptations and dangers inseparable from their peculiar disposi-

tions and circumstances in life. For instance, a naturally timid child is in danger of becoming deceitful. It commits some fault, and is tempted by fear of blame or punishment to try to conceal its fault by deceit. A naturally irritable child is in danger of becoming quarrelsome and unkind. A very quick child is in danger of becoming careless: the ease with which it does its lessons is apt to make it so. As we grow older, the form of these special temptations changes, but still they arise from our disposition or circumstances, and often the greatest danger arises from our greatest advantages. For instance, the possession of those qualities which win men's admiration, such as eloquence, or ready wit, is very apt to nourish vanity in those who possess them. Vanity gradually poisons the very essence of their virtue; and the love of praise becomes imperceptibly the ruling motive of their lives.

One great lesson, then, which we learn from David's sin and punishment, is that we must not only be watchful against temptation generally, but that everyone should consider carefully what particular circumstances of his life or disposition are most likely to endanger his faith and virtue. In other words, he ought to consider most carefully what are the special stumbling-blocks over which he individually is most likely to fall, for in that way he will be more on his guard against them and better able to avoid them.

Another lesson, of immense importance, may be learnt from this sad story. It is on the government of our thoughts. If when David first coveted Uriah's wife, he had at once dismissed the bad thought from his mind, it could not have acquired sufficient strength to master his virtue as it did. Want of watchfulness with regard to the new influences which were affecting his character, and the thoughts which he allowed to dwell in his mind, were the causes of David's sin, and surely there is no life in sacred or other history which so powerfully teaches us the occasion we have for humility and prayer. Let us close this lesson with St. Paul's solemn warning, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.'

Bathsheba's child died, as Nathan had foretold, almost as soon as it was born. In succeeding lessons we shall read of the family affliction and public humiliation which David had to endure as a further punishment for his sin.

LESSON 92.

Absalom's Rebellion.

AFTER the events which we have lately been considering, the sword did indeed come upon David's house: the greater part of his sorrow and trouble thenceforward was caused by members of his own family. A quarrel arose between two of his sons, Amnon

and Absalom, which ended in the murder of Amnon. Absalom was the favourite son of David, but he knew that after his dreadful deed he could not be allowed to remain in his father's kingdom, so he fled to a neighbouring king, at whose court he remained two years. His beauty and good-humour had made him a great favourite with the people, and especially with Joab, the chief of the army, who determined, if possible, to bring him back to Jerusalem. Joab found a woman, whom he instructed to go before the king, and tell him a pitiful tale about two sons of her own, of whom one had slain the other. The survivor, she said, was demanded from her that he might be put to death, as a punishment for the murder he had committed; but so she would be left without any son: 'They shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.' The king, as judge, promised the woman that her case should be considered; but then she went on as Joab had before instructed her, to ask the king whether he could have care for her, and still allow his own son to remain in exile.

David found out Joab's part in the matter, and, although he was annoyed at his interference, he yielded so far as to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem; still, however, refusing to see him. Two years passed away, and Absalom was at last admitted to David's presence, and, to all appearance, they were reconciled.

But Absalom was not contented with being one of the princes of the land, or even with being the chief favourite of his father. The indulgence with which he had been treated had diminished instead of increasing Absalom's respect for David, and he formed a design to become king in his father's place. The way in which he carried out the design was very clever; but, as in many other cases of deceit and wickedness, the cleverness he showed seems to add to his guilt. When any man was coming to the king to ask for his judgment in any matter, Absalom would call him aside and ask him all about his business. When he had found out what the matter was, he would tell the man that his case was clear and right, but that he could not get justice from the king, because the king had appointed no man to hear such cases. Then he would add 'I wish I were judge in the land, I would do justice.'

Another part of Absalom's plan was comparatively easy to him. He was, as already stated, good-humoured; his good-humour readily passed into fawning and flattery of the people. When they addressed him as prince, he tried to convince them that he was one of themselves, and therefore would not allow them to bow down to him, but took them by the hand and kissed them. A kiss, it must be remarked, was a part of the usual Eastern salutation *between equals*.

In this way 'Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.'

At length his plans were fully formed : on a pretence of wishing to offer a sacrifice to God, he went to Hebron, where, by his appointment, other conspirators met him and proclaimed him king. When the news was brought to Jerusalem, David and his counsellors were in the greatest trouble. They came, however, to the resolution to leave the city, lest they should lose their lives. At this particular period of his history David seems to have lost most of the courage which had distinguished him in past times. Certainly he was growing old, and many years of settled life had destroyed a great deal of the fiery valour which had distinguished him ; yet, not long after, David showed some of his old bravery again. The reason for this temporary timidity seems to have been a moral reason. Before, when David had been in danger, his heart had been pure and his conscience clear ; but now he had the memory of a great sin hanging over him, and seems to have known that the rebellion of Absalom was part of the punishment which God intended him to suffer. He knew that Absalom was wrong, but he knew also that he himself was not right. Besides, the leader of the rebellion was the son whom he had loved the most of all his family, and the sense of the base ingratitude with which Absalom was returning his love, would be enough to take away from him all power of action or resistance. With only a few friends he left Jerusalem and crossed the Jordan, thinking that when he had put that stream between his enemies and himself his life would be safe.

The description of the flight of David, given in the chapters of which this lesson is an epitome, is full of pathetic incidents. The old king, bowed down with grief, and walking barefoot, went out of the city that he had founded, or at least rebuilt, and 'all the country wept with a loud voice.' He had to bear the pain of parting from some of his valued friends, leaving them behind him, in the hope that they might do more good there than if they were with him. And, even worse, he had to bear, without being able to check them, the revilings of an old adherent of Saul's family, who, we may suppose, had been obliged to keep quiet all the time that David was in power, but who burst out into furious exultation as soon as he appeared to have fallen hopelessly from his royal dignity.

LESSON 93.

Read 2 Samuel xviii.

Soon after David had left Jerusalem Absalom reached it. Had he gone on at once in pursuit of his father there can be no doubt that he would have gained his end, and have made himself king. But he disregarded advice to this effect, given to him by Ahithophel, in

favour of a plan suggested by Hushai, who, while pretending to approve the rebellion, was really a secret friend of David. Hushai recommended Absalom to wait awhile and establish himself firmly in Jerusalem, and thereby to let all men know that he was king. During that time, he said, David would be losing strength, but if he were attacked at once, he and those who were with him, though they were but few, would make a desperate resistance, for they were all men trained to war, and would be 'chafed in their minds,' that is, fierce and savage, 'as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field.'

Hushai's counsel had its intended effect. David was not losing, but gaining strength; his little army had been in a kind of panic, but the delay gave them time to rally, and the old king himself gained the shelter of a fortified town, called Mahanaim. At length, however, Absalom and his men crossed the Jordan, and the two armies were ready for the conflict, about which we have just been reading.

Not much need be said about the battle, but one thing is to be borne in mind. David's army was, as far as we can discover, much smaller than that of the rebels, but it was composed of men who were well disciplined and under able commanders. David himself wished to take the chief command, but was persuaded by his friends to take charge only of the reserve, first, that his life might not needlessly be exposed to danger; and, secondly, that he might assist whichever of the three divisions of the army in the field might stand most in need of help. However, the battle was fought and won without any necessity for calling out the reserve. The discipline of David's troops was more than a match for the numbers of their enemies.

About the manner of Absalom's death it is necessary to say a word or two. Pictures have often been drawn representing Absalom hanging by his long hair from the branch of a tree. Such a thing is not impossible, but it is very improbable; it is much more likely that his head was caught, as he rode, in the fork between two branches—a position from which he could not extricate himself, and in which he was killed by Joab and his men.

The chief thing to be noticed in the chapter is the very great tenderness with which David spoke of his wicked son. His intention of going out to the battle himself was evidently not the result of a wish to revenge himself, but of the hope that he might be able to protect Absalom from the fury of the soldiers. He was a king who had been driven from his kingdom, a father whose love had been rewarded with hatred and disobedience, but still he was a father, and could not wish evil to his son. His command to the three captains: 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom,' shows how little he cared for a victory which

would rob him of a son. All this is perfectly natural. Parents do not cease to care for their children because their children are wicked and disobedient. Words like those in which David expressed his grief have been used by many a parent since: 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

LESSON 94.

David's Return to Jerusalem.

THE triumph of David's cause was the source of very little joy to his people or to himself. He was so grieved on account of Absalom's death that he could not for the time remember that it was the saving of his own life and kingdom; and the people, when they heard of his deep grief, were ashamed of themselves as having been in part the cause of it. They dared not meet his reproaches, and, instead of coming joyfully to Mahanaim as victors, 'they got themselves by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.'

Joab saw the danger there was that the people, so discouraged, would leave the king altogether, and went to David and told him very plainly what he thought. Joab, as we know already, was a hard man, but he had a great deal of shrewd practical common-sense. David's fatherly heart was grieved at the death of his beloved Absalom, but he had duties to perform as a king; the first of these duties was to thank his brave soldiers who had saved the kingdom. If he put off doing so they would all be quite ready to accept Joab's explanation: 'Thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither princes nor servants; for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.' Listening to Joab's hard-spoken, but sensible, advice, David put a curb upon his own feelings, and with 'sublime repression of himself' went out and sat in state at the gate, the public place of the city. The death of Absalom put an end to the rebellion; he being dead, there was no one left to dispute David's right to the kingdom. But while the king remained at Mahanaim, on the eastern side of the Jordan, the kingdom was in confusion. David's flight from Jerusalem seemed to be, and virtually was, an act of abdication, so that, until he was recalled to the city, he could not exercise all the offices of a king. Many of his friends exerted themselves, and obtained from the men of Judah the right to take a message to David:—'Return thou, and all thy servants.' The return to Jerusalem was very different from the flight which had taken place a short time before; even Shimei, the friend of Saul's family, who had cursed David when he was flying from his son, came and knelt down to him, and begged for his forgiveness.

David's stern nephews wished to punish Shimei, but David resolved to pardon him and all the rebels. 'Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?' These words express what, in modern language, we should call an act of general amnesty, that is, a resolve to forgive and forget all past offences.

Accompanied by his friends, and saluted by the greetings of all the people, David retraced in triumph the road he had traversed in grief, and was settled once more in his royal city. But he had no sooner returned than a quarrel, which threatened to become a very serious one, arose between the men of Judah and those of the ten northern tribes.¹

The northern tribes, who greatly out-numbered the tribe of Judah, had not been consulted at all before the message was sent to David inviting him to return to Jerusalem. It seemed to them that the men of Judah had taken too much upon themselves in acting so independently. The men of Judah excused themselves by alleging that they were of the king's kindred, but this only increased the jealousy. We have ten parts to your one part, said the men of the ten tribes, 'Why, then, did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king?'

With all this jealousy the northern tribes seem at first to have been loyal to David, but a certain man named Sheba, called 'a man of Belial'—that is, a worthless fellow—took advantage of the dispute to raise an insurrection against David. He was a Benjamite, a member of the tribe to which Saul belonged, and his intention may have been to restore the kingdom to the family of Saul. A large number of men from the ten northern tribes followed Sheba, and formed themselves into an army. The words, 'Every man to his tents, O Israel,' which were used by Sheba, became known in after time as the cry of revolution. But Sheba's attempt failed. The men who were faithful to David pursued him and his army until he entered into a city named Abel. In that city the rebel chief was put to death, and after that peace was re-established. This was the last endeavour made by the Benjamites to set up a dynasty to rival that of David. The next disturbance of the kingdom was due to other causes.

With this rebellion the troubles of David's reign, so far as they arose from wars, were at an end. Twice the country was greatly

¹ The tribe of Simeon, which was settled in the country to the south of Judah seems, by the time of which we are reading, to have almost dropped out of the national life.

Scattered Simeonites there were among the other tribes, but as a tribe we hear next to nothing of them, after the settlement under Joshua.

afflicted, once by famine, once by pestilence, but no attempt was again made to overthrow David's authority.

LESSON 95.

Read 1 Chronicles **xxix.** 1-20.

THE first thing to be done in this lesson is to give a short account of the book from which the passage which we have just read is taken—the Book of Chronicles. We have in our Bibles a First Book and a Second Book of Chronicles, but there is no doubt that they were originally one.

About 200 years before Christ—that is to say, rather more than 2,000 years ago—when the books of the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into Greek for the use of the Jews who were living in foreign lands, the translators called this book 'Paralipomena,' or 'things left out,' evidently thinking that it was intended to supply some information omitted in the Books of Samuel and Kings. There is a great deal of truth in this view, for we are able, by means of the history given in the Book of Chronicles, to fill up several gaps which occur in the other histories. But the more generally accepted view is that the books which stand first in our Bibles, Samuel and Kings, were made up of the accounts given by persons who were living when the events related took place; their purpose was to give to men of after days such an account of the transactions as would enable them to understand the character of the persons engaged in them. The Books of Chronicles, on the other hand, seem to be collections of what we should call state papers, and to refer more to the nation and the Church of Israel than to the personal lives and characters of the kings and others of whom mention is made. Such a collection, it is believed, was not put together until many years after the events occurred.

The passage which we have now read is not found in the Book of Samuel; it throws very little light upon the character of David, but tells us a great deal about the preparation he made for one of the most important events in the history of the Jewish Church, namely, the building of the Temple at Jerusalem.

Immediately after David's appointment and confirmation as king over all Israel he had desired to build a Temple at Jerusalem, but was commanded by God to leave that work for his successor. Afterwards, it appears, the reason why he should not do the work was explained to him. The work of building a House of God was not suitable to a man who had been so long engaged in fierce and bloody wars. A son should be given him who should be a man of peace, and who should be allowed to undertake the building. That promise David believed was ful-

filled in his son, Solomon, whose name means 'peaceful,' and whom David chose, by Nathan's advice, to be his successor. The desire had been keen in David all through his reign, and although he was forbidden to carry it into execution, he made great preparations, storing up gold, silver, brass, and wood, for his son, Solomon, to use for building the Temple. But the utmost preparation that one man could make would be insufficient for such a building as David intended: 'The House that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries.' Besides, David wished the act to be a national act, and therefore he resolved to give all the people an opportunity of contributing according to their means towards the erection of the Temple.

The occasion on which the people were assembled together at Jerusalem was very important. David's purpose in calling together the princes, elders, captains, and officers was twofold. He wanted to interest them in the work of building the Temple, and to receive any offerings for that purpose which they might be willing to give; and also he wished, during his life, to present Solomon to them as their future king, and to obtain from them the promise that they would be loyal and obedient to him. He succeeded in both these purposes. The people gave, not by compulsion, but willingly and with perfect heart, and rejoiced in their giving; and David also rejoiced with great joy. And when their gifts had been bestowed, they anointed Solomon, and accepted him to be their chief governor.

David's prayer and thanksgiving, which occupy a large part of the passage which we have read to-day, show that he had learnt very much since the time when first he had expressed his wish to build a Temple for the worship of God. Then he had ~~seemed to~~ think that God required that service of him, and that he would be doing some kind of honour to God by the service. But, before the end of his life, he had found out that God Himself is the source of all honour, and the giver of all power and wealth; so that whatever men wish to offer to Him, they can offer Him nothing that is not His own. He had found out also that what God does require is that men should offer themselves to Him, to serve Him with pure and willing hearts. He knew that men were feeble and short-lived, but that God is almighty and everlasting, and therefore he not only thanked God for the mercies He had already shown to him and his people, but prayed that blessing, and especially the blessing of a perfect heart, which would keep them in obedience to all God's laws, might be given to all the people, and to Solomon, and to those who should come after them for ever.

LESSON 96.

David's Last Days.

THE assembling of the people and the dedication of their gifts with his own to the purpose of building the Temple was the last public act of David's reign. He was an old man, failing in strength, and could no longer discharge all his duties. In his lifetime, therefore, he chose Solomon as his successor, and gave up to him a great part of the work. We might have expected that David would have chosen the eldest of his sons to succeed him, according to the modern custom in our own country ; but that was not always a custom even here, and still less in Eastern countries. The succession to a kingdom in the East generally descends in the same family ; that is to say, one of the sons of the reigning king is appointed to succeed him, and often commences his active reign before the old king's death. But the son chosen is not always the eldest son. Eastern kings have many wives ; David was in this respect like other kings ; but all the wives are not considered equal ; one is the chief wife or queen, and her children are held to have the best title to the succession. This is the way in which we account for David's choice of Solomon ; the chief wife or queen was Bathsheba, who was Solomon's mother. The choice of Solomon, however, we may be quite sure, would not be likely to be very pleasing to the sons of David by other wives.

Adonijah, David's eldest son, resolved to try to upset the arrangement ; he collected a number of his friends, who feasted with him and saluted him as king. When the news of this was brought to David, he commanded the chief officers of his court to take Solomon, and conduct him in procession round the city, to blow with the trumpets and proclaim 'Solomon is king !' and then to bring him back to the palace, and seat him on the throne. All this was done, and thus Solomon's reign began : David lived some little time afterwards, but Solomon had all the outward state, and discharged the duties of King over all Israel.

Now, at the end of David's history, we may pause and, as it were, look around us. When David came to the throne, Israel was oppressed by many enemies and hemmed in on all sides. His valour and prudence had made the kingdom one of the real powers of that part of the world. He defeated the Philistines, and kept them within narrow limits on the western frontier, between Judah and the shore of the Mediterranean ; he subdued entirely several of the wild tribes who dwelt eastward of the Jordan, and added their territories to his dominions. The nation was never in a more prosperous state than at the end of his long reign of forty years. Peace had been won as the result of hard fighting, for there was

not one of the enemies of Israel to whom David yielded. But his prudence as well as his valour was exercised for the benefit of his people. The Israelites never were, as a people, given to foreign travel and commerce; they did not care for sea voyages, and they had scarcely a harbour in which they could have sheltered a fleet of ships if they had had one. Their neighbours of Tyre and Sidon were exactly their opposite in this matter; they were the best and most daring sailors, the most distant traders, known in those old times. With them David did not quarrel; they lived beyond the limits of the country promised to the Israelites, and therefore, although they were of the same family of nations as those whom the Israelites drove out of Canaan, David endeavoured to use their travels for the benefit of his own people who were always staying at home. He made alliance with the king of Tyre, and from him obtained supplies of many things which he and his people needed, but which were not produced within his own realm.

Let us conclude this lesson by reading from the 23rd Chapter of the 2nd Book of Samuel part of a poem which is called 'The Last Words of David.' We have noticed in David's history that his will was to do what was right, and that when he did wrong, he generally did so under the influence of some momentary passion which quite overmastered his will. But those sins sometimes led to more deliberate wickedness. He seems always, when at his best, to have remembered that he did not hold his kingly power by any desert or merit of his own, but by the will of God who had chosen him, had taken him from the sheepfolds and made him to be ruler of His people Israel. We may remember also, that when his evil deeds brought upon him their natural result, shame and suffering, he did not repine or rebel, but acknowledged that he deserved all the suffering he had to undergo. All this seems to be expressed in his 'last words,' which are as follows:—

'He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a clear morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.'

LESSON 97.

Read 1 Kings iii.

THE dream of Solomon, of which we have had an account in the chapter just read, although it was but a dream, marks a very important point in his life. The dreams which we have at night are very often continuations of some thoughts with which our minds have

been busy during the day ; and it is not at all likely that Solomon would in his dream have asked for wisdom, if he had not already made up his mind to the truth which he expressed afterwards in words which all of us ought to remember : ' Wisdom is more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.'

At David's death Solomon was quite young, and had a very hard task to perform. The kingdom over which he had to rule was very much larger than that which David ruled when his reign began ; all the organisation, the appointment of officers, deputies, and governors of provinces, fell to him, because without the royal commission they would not be obeyed by the people under them. Then he had also to make treaties and engagements with foreign princes, and especially with the King of Tyre, from whom he wanted to obtain materials and workmen for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. All this could not be done without the expenditure of much money, and one of the most difficult tasks that the young king had before him was to decide how much the people of his kingdom should pay as their share of this work and of other public improvements. Lastly, if Solomon was to fulfil the conditions laid down for a ruler in his father's last words, he needed a sense of justice, that in all his decisions of disputes between his subjects he might be guided by truth and not by fear or favour. He was called to rule over men ; it was required of him that he should be just, ' ruling in the fear of God.'

All these things Solomon must have pondered over while he was awake, for they are very nearly the reasons given by him in his dream, why he asked not for wealth, honour, or long life, but for ' an understanding heart.'

And although the answer to his wish was a part of the dream, we cannot help feeling that it had a great effect upon him. From that time he must have felt himself pledged to seek for wisdom first, and must have been encouraged by the knowledge that with wisdom would come, without his seeking them, riches and honour and length of days.

The latter part of the chapter tells us how on one occasion Solomon showed his wisdom and his knowledge of the human heart in his decision of a difficult case brought before him for judgment. Hearing the stories of the two women, he could not decide which was true and which was false, and therefore he resolved to allow nature to decide for him. He knew that the mother of the living child would much prefer giving up her child if its life could only thereby be saved, and the result proved that his knowledge of the mother's instinct had directed him rightly.

One lesson, of importance to us all, we may learn from the

history we have read to-day. Each of us, on entering life, has to choose an object to pursue. We may choose the pursuit of what is pleasant, merely; or the pursuit of what is right. Pleasure is very attractive indeed, especially to young people, and therefore they naturally desire to get such things as will lead to pleasure: money, some people fancy, will get them all they can wish for, and so they seek for money; others think that the best of all things is to be well thought of and well spoken of by other people, and so they desire honour. And in these desires there is nothing wrong: it is right that we should wish to enjoy ourselves—God intended that we should do so; it is right also to esteem at their proper value both money and honour, which add greatly to enjoyment. But if pleasing ourselves is the only motive of all these wishes we make a great mistake, and shall find out the mistake by-and-by. The thing which we should desire is wisdom; by which is meant, not only knowledge gained out of books, or learnt from teachers, but knowledge of our duty to God and to our neighbour, and power to do our duty. That desire may not bring us money or great honour among men; but it will make us rich in ourselves and will make us acceptable to God. The choice is between two things, and none of us can be uncertain which we ought to choose: the search for pleasure is pleasing ourselves; the search for wisdom is pleasing God.

LESSON 98.

Read 1 Kings viii. 22—61.

THE chapters of the Bible which we have passed over contain accounts of the actual building and form of the Temple at Jerusalem. It would be impossible, without pictures of the building, to understand the description given in the chapters we have omitted, and, if there ever were any such pictures, they have all been lost long ago, so that now nobody can be quite sure what the Temple was like. It was altogether an immense collection of buildings, and was made as beautiful and glorious as all Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the skill of the clever workmen whom he employed, could make it. There is no doubt at all, however, about the passage of Scripture which we have just read. It commences with the prayer offered by Solomon when the Temple was quite finished, and dedicated, or set apart, for the worship of God. Let us now consider some of its most important parts, and the lessons which we may learn from them.

1. Heathen people generally regard the temples which they build for their gods as the fixed habitations of the gods themselves. But Solomon knew that the One True God to whom he was then

dedicating the Temple was not such a being as to dwell only in one small place; he knew that God is everywhere. 'Behold,' he said, 'the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have builded?' Why, then, did he build the Temple? Not for the sake of God, but for the sake of men. It is quite true that God is everywhere, and that wherever men offer their prayers to Him, He can hear and answer them. But very generally, even now, what may be done anywhere or at any time is not done at all, and therefore it is a very great advantage to men to have a definite appointed place in which they may assemble together and offer their prayers and thanksgivings to God. This is at the beginning of Solomon's prayer, and we must bear it in mind as we read; otherwise we may fancy that all the prayers which follow refer only to the Temple, and therefore have no meaning for us.

2. The first separate petition made by Solomon is that all the people of Israel may have such reverence for the God of Truth that they may fear to make any promises, or to swear any oaths in His name, which they will not faithfully keep. The Temple will so be a witness of truth and justice between man and man.

3. Then follows the mention of several calamities, war, drought, pestilence, famine, with respect of which Solomon entreats God to hear the petitions of the people, and to forgive the sins which may have brought these calamities upon them.

4. The next part of Solomon's prayer is almost the most important for us to consider. It is very nearly the first acknowledgment we find in the Bible, after the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, that God is the God of all the earth, and not of the Israelites only. The people of Israel had been separated from other nations, and many of them had thought that their separation was a proof that they were special favourites of God. Solomon had learnt better; it may be that the remembrance that he could not have built the Temple without foreign architects and workmen came upon him as he prayed; at all events, he prayed, not for Israel only, but for the strangers, that is, foreigners, as well.

5. The conclusion of the prayer is in a sadder strain. Solomon had prayed for the people in the land given to their fathers, but he knew that the promise of their abiding in the land was made conditionally; if they disobeyed and sinned against God, they might be carried away as prisoners to a land that was not theirs. How true a foresight it was we shall soon learn. The Temple was to be a sign of union as long as the Israelites dwelt in their own land; what would it be to them when they were in captivity? Would it not be a remembrance that they had been delivered from captivity in Egypt, and, after all their unfaithfulness and sin, had been

established in Canaan? If it was that, it would be an encouragement to them to repent and confess their sins, and turn again with all their hearts to obey God's laws. Solomon therefore prayed that such repentance and conversion might be accepted by God, and that the people might be brought back from their captivity. The whole prayer is thus a confession of belief that, under all circumstances, prayer to God is the reasonable and right resource of His people.

The words we have considered speak very much of national prayers; but there is one sentence which shows Solomon's conviction that personal prayers also are right and acceptable to God. 'What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this house: then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest; (for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men).'

LESSON 99.

Solomon's Fall and Death.

FOR some time, probably for many years, after the dedication of the Temple, Solomon's life was one of great honour and glory. He consolidated his wide dominions by building fortified cities in commanding situations, and increased the material prosperity of his countrymen by undertaking on his own account and encouraging in others trading expeditions both to the East and the West. The port from which his Eastern navy sailed was Ezion-geber, now called Akabah, at the head of the eastern arm of the Red Sea. The result of these commercial adventures is thus described: 'The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore-trees that are in the vale, for abundance.'

But this material prosperity was mixed with, and perhaps was the cause of, a great deal of moral evil. It happened in Solomon's time, as it has often happened since, that habits of luxurious living grew out of material prosperity. The evil affected the king himself. At a time when, as we are told, all the kings of the earth came to him to hear his wisdom, he was fast sinking into self-indulgence and folly. He seems to have grown prouder of the vessels of gold that were used in his household, and of the ivory throne on which he sat, than of the wisdom and justice which had at first been the objects of his desire. He was brought into contact with people of different nations, and made alliances with their kings. This, possibly, would have done him no harm; but he was induced to adopt

the practices of the monarchs of surrounding heathen lands, and, especially, to increase beyond measure the number of his wives. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines or inferior wives; and all of these were chosen from idolatrous nations. He allowed to all of them the full exercise of their native religions, so that in his own palace there were worshippers of all the gods of the surrounding heathen countries. This laxity on the part of one who had known so well that there was only One True God must have led to painful consequences; but Solomon was guilty of something much worse than laxity. He built temples in the hill that is before Jerusalem (called ever afterwards the Hill of Offence) for the gods of the Moabites and Ammonites, and of all the other nations from which his wives had come, and even joined his foreign wives in the worship of their idols. 'He did evil in the sight of the Lord.' It seems scarcely possible, and yet it is true, that the same man who built the Temple to God and consecrated it by that sublime prayer which we read only yesterday, should have sunk so low as to worship the stock of a tree, or bow down before a brazen idol, the chief ceremony of whose worship consisted in the burning alive of innocent children.

Such faithlessness was not allowed to go unpunished. The promise made to David and repeated to Solomon was, like all God's promises, conditional. *If* is the word with which it began; 'if thy children keep My laws,' then their kingdom should last; but if not, it should be destroyed. Solomon had not kept God's laws, but had disregarded them entirely, and so had forfeited all right to his throne. He was warned of this, but still, it seems, he did not repent of his evil deeds; self-indulgence had altogether blinded him to the consequences of his actions. The separation of the greater part of his dominions from his own rule, or that of his family, was only a question of time; and his arbitrary and tyrannical conduct did much to make the time short. That separation we shall soon have to consider. Now, however, let us mark the awful contrast between the beginning and the end of Solomon's reign.

He began by desiring wisdom and understanding that he might do judgment and justice; he undertook immediately the building of a Temple for the worship of God, and at its consecration offered a prayer which shows that he knew more about religion than any man of the time; he ended as a worshipper of idols, bowing down to that which his own hands had made.

There are two lessons which we all ought to learn from this sad history.

1. Solomon in his youth chose wisdom instead of self-indulgence. In that he was quite right. But he forgot that making a

choice is one thing, and abiding by the choice is another. 'Work well begun,' the proverb says, 'is half done;' that is true, but only *half* done. Perseverance in a good choice is quite as necessary as choosing well at first. If Solomon had continued to seek wisdom first of all things, he would not have fallen into such a miserable condition as he did fall into.

2. Solomon knew all about the true religion, and forsook it for the worst idolatry. Knowing what is right is not of the slightest use to any man, unless he does what he knows to be right. This is all the difference between what is called religious knowledge and religion: one is a thing only of the understanding; the other of the heart and the life.

The history ends with these words: 'Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.'

LESSON 100.

The Division of the Kingdom.

IN the last lesson mention was made of the warning given to Solomon that his kingdom would be divided, and that the greater part of it would be taken away from his family. Very soon after Solomon's death the division actually took place, in a manner which it is the object of our present lesson to describe. When we try to find out the causes of this separation, we discover that they were partly the result of Solomon's own action, and partly of the folly of Rehoboam, his son and successor.

The large expenditure which was made necessary by the great works undertaken by Solomon, both for his own pleasure and for what he thought to be the advantage and glory of his nation, was met by very heavy taxes laid upon the people. Besides these money-taxes the king demanded the personal services of large numbers of the people. He took them away from their own work, and made them labour for him. In both these respects the example of Oriental despotisms was closely imitated. An Oriental king is accustomed to look upon himself as the supreme master of all his subjects, and in some way as the owner of all their property. He therefore considers that he has a right to take as much of their money as he needs, and to demand from them labour, paying them no wages in return, but only giving them their food. In very many Eastern countries the people have for a long time acknowledged these rights on the part of their monarchs, but in the end they have generally risen against them in rebellion. Even if they have merely felt and uttered their discontent without any active attempt at revolution, they have very

seriously weakened the power of their kings. These things have occurred again and again even in countries in which people have been accustomed to be treated as slaves. But the Israelites had not been used to such treatment, and although they had submitted to it during the reign of Solomon, they were not all disposed to continue their submission after his death. Succession to a kingdom, it must be remembered, was not then the simple thing that it is amongst ourselves. Now, in our own land, when one sovereign dies, his or her heir succeeds without any dispute or difficulty. The cause of this is that our kingdom is a very old-established one. The kingdom of Israel was, on the other hand, quite a new thing. There had been only three kings of Israel altogether—Saul, David, and Solomon,—and already there had been one change of dynasty, from Saul's family to David's. Therefore it was quite reasonable that at the accession of Rehoboam the people should demand some promise from him that he would show more respect for their rights than his father had shown. Their leaders and spokesmen were persons who had endured personal wrongs from Solomon, and the chief of them was Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim. Before they would consent to make Rehoboam their king, they required from him an answer to an appeal which they put in these words: 'Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.' Rehoboam asked for time to consider this matter, promising to give the people an answer in three days. In the meantime he asked the opinion of two classes of advisers; first, he consulted the old men who had been with his father; they advised him to yield to the demands of the people, assuring him that if he would be their servant for once they would be his servants for ever. This advice was not very pleasing to Rehoboam, and therefore, in the second place, he sought the opinion of the young men, who were his associates, and who could not then have known anything more about the matter than he did. They told him that he should not yield at all to the people's wishes, but treat their expression of discontent as a commencement of rebellion. They advised him to reply that he would make his yoke heavier than his father's had ever been; to exert all his authority and say, 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.'

The third day came, and the people assembled to hear Rehoboam's reply. In his folly he uttered to them the very words which his foolish advisers and companions had recommended. The result of this assertion of what he considered the dignity of his office was that he lost at once about five-sixths of his kingdom.

Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to him, but the other tribes said, 'What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David.' Under the leadership of Jeroboam, whom they made their king, the ten tribes formed what is known as the Kingdom of Israel, while Judah and Benjamin together are known as the Kingdom of Judah.

Henceforth, we have two histories to follow. We will take first the history of the larger kingdom, that of Israel, and afterwards return to the history of Judah; for so we shall be able to understand the course of the history better than if we took the events of both together in chronological order. It must be understood now, therefore, that for several lessons after the present one we shall be speaking of a kingdom quite independent of the house of David.

LESSON 101.

Read 1 Kings xii. 25.—xiii. 10.

SOME time since, in the lesson on David's desire to build a Temple for the worship of God at Jerusalem, it was observed that, whether the thought of national unity came into David's mind or not, the carrying out of his purpose would be a great help towards maintaining the unity of the nation. This passage shows us that Jeroboam was certainly of that opinion. From all that we read about Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, which henceforth we are to call the Kingdom of Israel, we are obliged to conclude that he was a very able man. He had been made king of Israel, but he did not feel at all sure that he would be able to retain his position. He acknowledged a right belonging to Rehoboam as David's descendant, a right superior to his own; he called Rehoboam the 'lord' or sovereign even of the ten tribes who had revolted from him, and he was afraid that at some time they would return to their allegiance. Such a return would be fatal not only to the separate existence of Jeroboam's kingdom, but to Jeroboam himself, and therefore he set himself to find out some plan by which he might render the return impossible. He saw quite clearly that if his subjects went to Jerusalem at the stated feasts, and joined there in common worship with the subjects of King Rehoboam, they could not long consider themselves a separate nation. If all could join in the same worship, why should they not unite in other things as well? Jeroboam estimated the danger rightly, and devised a very clever plan for avoiding it. He was acquainted with the past history of his people, and knew what a strong tendency they had to the worship of idols, that is, of things which they could see. If he could give them some seen

objects of worship, he thought he would be able to prevent them from going to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the unseen God. During the latter part of Solomon's reign Jeroboam had lived in Egypt, and had seen what forms the Egyptians gave to the images of their gods. The chief form was that which the Israelites had once already made for themselves when they were in the wilderness—the form of the calf. Jeroboam made two calves of gold, and set them up, one at the northern, the other at the southern, extremity of his dominions, at Dan and Bethel, and then issued a proclamation to his subjects, using the very words spoken by Aaron and the elders of Israel about 500 years before: 'Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.'

It is generally believed that in this course of action Jeroboam did not intend to teach his people to worship any other than the One God, but that he wished to give them certain forms, not authorised by the Law, according to which they might conduct their worship. That he did not wish to force upon the minds of his people any thought of distinction between the two kinds of worship is quite plain, from the care he showed to have an order of priests, or persons whose duty it was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, and from his appointment of feasts in Dan and Bethel, to be held at the same time with the solemn feasts at Jerusalem. In both these matters likeness to the Temple worship, not difference from it, was the point at which Jeroboam aimed. But, with all his prudence, Jeroboam was not a good man. His religion was a matter of policy, and was not acceptable to God, because it was carried on in violation of the commands given by God to Moses, and ordered by Him to be observed throughout all generations. Jeroboam's power is always spoken of with respect by the sacred historians, but they add to his name a very true but very awful description, calling him again and again, 'Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.'

The latter part of the passage we have read shows that Jeroboam was not allowed to go on in his wrong way without a warning that it was wrong. A prophet, or, as he is called, a man of God, came to Bethel on one of the great feast-days appointed by Jeroboam, and cried against the altar in the word of the Lord. The person of a prophet is almost always held sacred, even by the most tyrannous of Eastern kings; but Jeroboam was so angry at the interruption offered by the man of God that he commanded his officers to seize him, and even put forth his own hand against him. The hand which he stretched out was instantly dried up, so that he could not move it, and at the same time the altar at which he was offering sacrifice was rent or broken into pieces. The king

acknowledged the authority of God's messenger so far as to beseech him to pray that the dried-up arm might be restored. This was done, and the man of God went away. But Jeroboam was not to be turned from his bad courses; he soon forgot his punishment and its removal, and went on in his evil way; so that we read, 'And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.'

LESSON 102.

Epitome to the First Appearance of Elijah.

JEROBOAM was an elected king: he came to the throne only because the people chose him; but, being made king, he desired that the sovereignty might continue in his family. Of all his children, only one son, Abijah, was of good disposition and character, and he fell sick. The wife of Jeroboam went to a prophet to inquire whether her son would recover, but the prophet delivered to her a message of evil. He told her that the son about whom she was anxious would die, and would be buried with honour amidst the mourning of the people, 'because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.' But all the others of Jeroboam's sons and descendants should die violent deaths, and their bodies should be eaten by the savage dogs of the cities, or by birds of prey, if they died in the open country. The poor mother returned with these heavy tidings to Tirzah, where she lived; but did not reach her home in time to see her son alive—as she came to the threshold of the door the child died.

Jeroboam's reign, which was full of war, lasted 22 years, and at his death he was succeeded by his son Nadab. Of Nadab we know scarcely anything, and need not wish to know more. We are told that 'he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.' While he was besieging a city of the Philistines, one of his subjects, named Baasha, conspired against him and slew him, and with him slew all the other descendants of Jeroboam, leaving none that breathed. Baasha, having slain the King Nadab, got himself acknowledged as king over Israel. With him begins a series of changes, difficult to follow even as we read the history in the Bible, and almost impossible to remember. The kingdom of Israel was at this time neither more nor less than a military despotism. Two generations seem to have been the longest time that the crown remained in the possession of any family. Violence took the place of right, and, as might be expected, the kings and people went from bad to worse.

As our object is to know the history of the time, we must set

down the names of these men, but we will say little about any of them, until we come to the most wicked of them all.

Baasha, as we have seen, slew Nadab, and made himself king of Israel. He was building a fortress on the frontier of the kingdom of Judah, with the intention of carrying war into the territory of the king of Judah, when he was attacked by Benhadad, king of Syria, whose capital was Damascus. In the war that followed, Benhadad took away a great part of Baasha's territory, and so compelled him to give up his designs against Judah. Baasha died, and was succeeded by his son Elah, who, after a reign of only two years, was slain by one of the officers of his army, named Zimri. Zimri made himself king, and, as he thought, secured himself from danger by the immediate slaughter of all the family of Baasha. But his reign was very short. He had been king one week only, when he was attacked by another soldier, named Omri. Seeing that his escape from the city in which Omri besieged him was hopeless, he shut himself up in the palace, and, setting fire to it, died in the conflagration. But Omri was not yet safe; another party arose, to claim the kingdom for Tibni, also a soldier. A battle between the rivals ended in the death of Tibni, and Omri became king. He bought a piece of land in a central position, the hill of Shemer, and there built a city, which he named, after the former owner of the land, Samaria. He also 'wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him.' At his death, which took place after he had reigned twelve years, six in Tirzah the old capital, and six in Samaria, which he himself had founded, he was succeeded by his son Ahab. This is the man mentioned just now as the most wicked of them all.

It is the general belief of scholars that the previous kings had not disowned Jehovah as the God of Israel; but Ahab went much further than any of his predecessors had dared to go. He married a heathen princess, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of Zidon, and introduced into Israel the worship of Baal, the Sun-god, whom the Zidonians worshipped. He built in Samaria a temple, which he dedicated to Baal, and encouraged the false worship among his people. 'Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.' Some of his wicked deeds, which showed not only that he despised God, but also that he delighted in doing injustice to men, we shall hereafter have occasion to consider. But now we must remark that Ahab's wickedness was mostly weakness; he had no principle of good in him, and when he was urged on by his wicked wife Jezebel he was ready to do any evil deeds; so that we are told 'he sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord,' and 'there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to do wickedness, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.'

LESSON 103.

Read 1 Kings xvii.

IN the chapter which we have now read we have the account of the first appearance of a man whose equal we can scarcely find among all the heroes of the Israelites. The king of Israel at the time was the weak and wicked Ahab; our attention, however, must be given as little as possible to him, and as much as possible to the person and work of the prophet Elijah.

First, let us quote from Dean Stanley's 'Lectures on the Jewish Church' a description of Elijah's appearance and habits: 'Wandering over the hills of Palestine, with no rest or fixed habitation—fleet as the wind when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he ran before the chariot of Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel—he was like the Bedouins at the present day, who run with unwearied feet by the side of the traveller's camel, and whose strange forms are seen for a moment behind rock or tree, in city or field, and then vanish again into their native wilderness. And such as they are, such was he also in his outward appearance. Long shaggy hair flowed over his back, and a large rough mantle of sheepskin, fastened around his loins by a girdle of hide, was his only covering. This mantle, the special token of his power, at times he would strip off, and roll up like a staff in his hand; at other times wrap his face in it.'

This was the kind of man who came to the luxurious Ahab, and said to him, 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.' What was the meaning of this tremendous message? Let us try to understand.

The people of Israel, as well as their wicked king, had forgotten the worship and power of Jehovah, the One True God, who had called their forefathers and made them a nation, and had adopted the worship of Baal or the Sun. Even in England we know something of the power of the sun's rays, and how it is their heat that ripens all the grain and the fruit for us in summer and autumn. But in those Eastern countries of which we read in the Bible, the heat of the sun, and the brightness of the sunshine, are out of all comparison greater than they are with us. It is not at all to be wondered at that people who knew no better should take the sun as the sign of supreme power, and, from regarding it as a sign, should proceed to consider it as itself the supreme power in the universe. But the Israelites had been taught that God, the Lord who brought them out of Egypt, had made the sun and all visible things, and they ought to have known better than to make a god of the thing created, and forget the Creator.

Elijah's message, then, was something to this effect: 'You, O Ahab, have forgotten, and taught your people to forget, the True God, and have worshipped the sun. You have ascribed to Baal all the fertility of your land, and all the blessings you enjoy. Now you shall learn that Baal, your bright sun-god, is not a living god, but that the Lord Jehovah, before whom I stand (i.e., whose servant I am—servants in the East always standing in the presence of their masters, ready to do their bidding), has power over those very things which you call the power of Baal. Sunshine you shall have, and more than enough; your Baal shall be for you the cause of famine and death.' The same lesson in other forms is taught in all the remaining part of the chapter. The powers of Nature, which Baal-worshippers made into gods, were proved to be servants of the One True Living God.

First, God was shown to be the ruler of the animal world; the ravens, for whom God provides, were made to be His messengers for the supply of His prophet's necessities.

Secondly, the increase of the small quantity of meal and the few drops of oil was the performance, in an extraordinary manner, of what God, not Baal, does in an ordinary manner, year after year, in the corn-fields and the olive-yards.

Thirdly, the raising of the son of the widow from death to life showed most strongly the contrast between the living God and the dead Baal; or, more exactly, between the life-giving Jehovah and Baal, the sun, who was merely one of His instruments. At the very time when the cattle and the crops of the Israelites, who were left to the power of the Baal whom they had chosen, were being destroyed and burnt up by his rays, the child of the woman who trusted in Jehovah, and received His prophet hospitably, was raised from death to life. Baal could only kill the living; Jehovah raised the dead to life. The woman expressed what she could not help feeling, in the words with which the chapter we have read concludes: 'Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.'

LESSON 104.

Read 1 Kings xviii.

DURING the three years of drought which followed Elijah's first appearance and declaration to Ahab, the people of Israel endured great hardships. At length the word of the Lord came to Elijah, commanding him to show himself to Ahab. He went out from the place where he had been concealed, and met Ahab's minister, Obadiah, who was a faithful worshipper of the Lord; to Obadiah he gave a message for the king: 'Go, tell thy lord, "Behold Elijah

is here.” Obadiah, knowing how suddenly Elijah had disappeared on the former occasion, was afraid to take the message to Ahab, lest by the time he returned to the place the prophet should have departed, and should leave him to Ahab's vengeance. But Elijah told him that he would surely show himself that day to Ahab, and so removed his fear. Ahab's first words to Elijah showed that he had not at all understood the cause of the evils from which his country had been suffering for three years. He called Elijah the troubler of Israel. But Elijah was not afraid of him; he said, ‘I have not troubled Israel;’ I am not the cause of all the suffering of these years of drought; the cause is the wickedness and idolatry of you and your family.

Then Elijah demanded a public trial in the presence of all the people to discover whether greater power belonged to Baal or to Jehovah. At Mount Carmel, a range of hills which overlooks the sea on one side, and the great plain of Northern Palestine on the other, the people were assembled. In the midst of the people were placed the priests of the rival religions; on one side the 850 priests of Baal and the groves, and on the other the one solitary figure of Elijah. Elijah began by asking the people to decide at once between the worship of the Lord and that of Baal. They were silent, and he went on to propose a test. Two bullocks should be chosen and laid on wood as for sacrifices, one by the priests of Baal, the other by Elijah; the two parties should call upon their gods to show their acceptance of these sacrifices by sending fire to consume them; if Baal answered by fire, he should be the god of Israel; if he did not so answer, and if, in reply to Elijah's prayer, the Lord sent fire to consume the other bullock, then it should be confessed by all that Jehovah was the True God.

The scene which followed is described in the chapter which we have just read, and described so plainly that scarcely any words of comment can enable us to understand it better. But one or two things which might otherwise be overlooked are worth notice. The first is the bravery with which Elijah, alone, faces 850 men who were entirely opposed to him, and who hated him bitterly. This bravery was due partly to the wild free life to which Elijah had been accustomed, but in a far greater degree to his firm trust in God, by whose commands he was acting. His conscience was clear; he knew that God was his Friend, and he could not be afraid of any number of men.

Next, let us observe the contrast between the way in which the false priests offered their prayers to Baal, and that in which Elijah prayed to the Lord. The false priests cried aloud on the name of Baal, saying, ‘O Baal, hear us,’ and repeating the same cry from morning till noon. At noon Elijah mocked them, telling them

that of course Baal, being a god, as they said, was able to help them, but that they were not making noise enough for him to hear. The mockery and scorn of all idol-worship which is contained in these words of Elijah cannot be surpassed. It had the effect, however, of making the false priests more urgent and louder in their cries and prayers, and made them show their earnestness in the most repulsive way. They got angry with their god, and leaped upon the altar they had made; then they tried to propitiate him, or induce him to listen to their prayers, by inflicting pain upon themselves; they cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out. Their own idea of their god was almost as low and mean as that which Elijah, who despised him altogether, had suggested to them. In this way twelve hours passed. In that time the sun, which they took as the symbol of the power of Baal, would have risen high in the sky, and, passing his greatest height, would have sunk again close to the horizon. Then Elijah came forth, and prepared the other altar. In the silence, doubly still after the noise made by Baal's priests, Elijah offered his prayer to God: 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word.'

He had scarcely finished, when the fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. The trial was over; it was proved, as the people shouted, that 'Jehovah was the God.'

But Elijah's work was not finished until he had destroyed the priests who had deceived the people of the Lord God of Israel. The execution of 850 men is a dreadful thing; but, we must remember, the question was between the death of 850 bad men, and the ruin, both in body and soul, of all the inhabitants of the kingdom of Israel.

LESSON 105.

Read 1 Kings xix.

THIS chapter shows us a very different side of Elijah's character, which also we must study, if we desire to understand his character as a whole. Elijah was a great man, but he was not more than a man. He could not go beyond human nature. Now, human nature is so constituted that we cannot bear any great excitement, without being conscious afterwards of great depression. Those who are most suited to meet a great strain of feeling or action are generally most liable to the despondency which comes with the reaction. Elijah had in one day done the work of a long period: even his strong bodily frame was wearied, and his mind, which had been so active, was tired out. His trust in God also seems to have grown feebler. His faith, which had enabled him to make

so brave a stand against the false worship, failed when he heard that Jezebel had resolved to take vengeance on him for the slaughter of the priests of her gods. At such times men naturally seek for solitude; and Elijah sought solitude in the desert, in which, as there is reason to believe, he was used to wander. His weariness, and the feeling that, although he had destroyed the false priests, still, with Jezebel alive, the false worship was as strong as ever, were more than he could bear. He desired to die, saying that he had been no better than his fathers. But he was aroused from his depth of despair to something like action, even if it were only the mechanical action of walking further and further from those who sought his life. He reached at last the mountainous country of Sinai where the Law had been proclaimed through Moses, and there, in Horeb, the Mount of God, he waited to know God's will.

In the revelation which God gave him he learnt three lessons, which the experience of sorrow and disappointment alone can help us to understand fully. In times of trial and affliction, which are sure to come sooner or later to us all, the memory of these lessons may come back to us and strengthen us.

1. While Elijah was in Horeb, there were displayed before him in their action all the loudest and most appalling forces of nature—whirlwind, earthquake, and fire; the description reads like that of a volcanic convulsion. But we read, the Lord was not in the wind, the Lord was not in the earthquake, the Lord was not in the fire. When these terrific displays of power were past, there came a still, small voice, a voice so low and calm that it seemed like silence. Then Elijah knew that God's message was come. How did he know that, and what had he learnt by the preparation for the voice? He had learnt that those things which have most outward show, or make most noise, are not really the most powerful. The greatest forces are really the most silent. Let us take an illustration. The force of an earthquake which often lifts and shakes hundreds of square miles of ground is accompanied with great disturbance and noise; but it is not nearly so great as the perfectly silent force of the sun's heat, which by evaporation raises day by day hundreds of thousands of tons of water from the sea to the clouds, and lets them fall again silently as rain or snow upon the land. That, or something like it, was the outward form of the lesson Elijah learnt: what it meant to his heart was this, that his great deed of daring and vengeance was not the greatest, that a time was coming when the calm voice of persuasion should accomplish more than he had been able to perform.

2. Elijah was taught that the time for his work was nearly

over. The new order of things, which the still, small voice typified, was to be commenced and carried on by another, not by himself. Scarcely any trial can be so great to a man of an ardent and active temperament as this, to know that his work will seem to be a failure. It will not be a failure: no work done honestly for the good of mankind and for the glory of God, ever was or ever will be a failure. But not to see the success of one's work is a disappointment indeed. Moses had just this disappointment to bear, and now Elijah, who was certainly, next to Moses, the greatest of the Israelites, had to bear it as well. What compensation was granted him we shall see afterwards.

3. Elijah fancied that he had been alone in Israel, that all others had forsaken God, and worshipped Baal. But God told him that He knew what Elijah could not know, that there were still 7,000 men in Israel who were faithful, whose knees had never been bowed to the false gods. Was Elijah glad or sorry to hear this? We may well believe that the feelings of joy and sorrow were mingled. He was not alone; the cause for which he had fought was not hopelessly lost; but then, he was not alone in the honour. It was true, as he had said, that he was not better than 7,000 of his brethren.

From this last lesson which Elijah learnt, we may draw both encouragement and warning for ourselves. Very often, when we hear of deeds of wickedness, when we are told that this man and that have done wrong, we are too ready to say that everything and everybody are in a bad state, that there is no truth and no honesty left, and that our country must soon sink and deserve to sink into ruin. But we ought to remember that we do not know everybody, even in our own town or district, much less everybody in the country, and that where *we* cannot see any good it is by no means certain that there is none. The good people and their good deeds are not yet quite overcome, and the best of men hope they never will be overcome by evil. What we have to do is to take care that we ourselves do not yield to any evil conduct, but try on the contrary to 'overcome evil with good.' St. Paul has a few words which he says are the seal of the Christian Church, and which sum up our lesson: 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.'

LESSON 106.

Read 1 Kings xxi. 1—20.

IN this passage the prophet Elijah reappears in his old character, that is to say, as the fearless rebuker of wickedness, and declarer of God's judgment upon wicked doers. We cannot understand the chapter without examining some part of the conduct of two people

besides Elijah, namely, the weak Ahab, and his wicked wife Jezebel.

Ahab's favourite employment was one which has been common among monarchs, that of building palaces in different parts of his dominions, and laying out the ground around them in parks or gardens. One of his palaces was at Jezreel, in the midst of the plain of Northern Palestine, and close to it was a vineyard which he wanted to buy from its owner. Even Ahab, it seems, had some respect for that part of the Mosaic Law which relates to property in land, and dared not use force to dispossess Naboth, the owner of the vineyard which he coveted. Naboth, on the other hand, refused to sell the land, considering that he had no right to dispose of it. It had belonged to his ancestors, and had come down to him: he had what we should call a life-interest in the property, and by selling it he would be doing an injustice to his heirs.

The conduct of Ahab when Naboth refused his request, and would neither sell nor exchange the vineyard, shows his weakness. He acted just as a child acts who cries for a toy. He laid himself on his bed, and would speak to nobody, and would not even eat. Jezebel's character was very different: she told Ahab that he ought to be ashamed of his weakness, and at once, in her wicked, clever mind, she formed a plan for giving her husband the land he wanted. Ahab was too weak to make such a plan himself; but when he found that his wife would do all the business for him, he was wicked enough to be glad of her help. He gave her his seal, and let her do what she chose. In Eastern countries to this day, the seal is the proof of the genuineness of a document. In England, a man's signature is usually sufficient to enable another man to know whether he has really written a paper which bears his name. But in the East, handwriting varies much less than among us, every little curve of a letter means something; and so many people write exactly alike that, without a seal which can never be used except with the knowledge and permission of the person to whom it belongs, nobody can be quite sure whether an order really comes with authority or not.

Jezebel's plan was most clever. She was an idolater and had introduced the worst form of idolatry among the people; but she thought that one of the forms of the old religious law of the Israelites could be used for Naboth's destruction. In Ahab's name, she summoned a meeting of the elders of Jezreel, and told them to bring Naboth to trial for blasphemy against God. By the old law, the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning; but that punishment might not be inflicted unless two witnesses at least were found to give evidence against the man accused of the

crime. For this Jezebel was prepared. In a land where there are rulers like Ahab and Jezebel, there are sure to be numbers of subjects who will do or say anything to gratify their rulers. Two such men—sons of Belial, as they are called, or worthless persons—were prevailed upon to give false evidence against Naboth. The court sentenced him to death; he was hurried out of the city and stoned, and news was sent to Samaria to Jezebel that all had been done according to her desire. She told Ahab that he might now take, for nothing, the land which he had in vain desired to buy, for the owner was not alive, but dead. Ahab went to take possession of the coveted piece of ground, but found there the man whom least of all he would have wished to meet, namely, Elijah the prophet. Again the foolish king saluted him as he had done when they met before the great sacrifice on Carmel, though not exactly in the same words. Then he had called him a disturber or troubler of Israel, now he addressed him as a personal enemy. Elijah did not attempt to deny the charge; this time it was a true one. Ahab had sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord, and therefore, and until he changed his course, not only was Elijah, but all true and honest men were enemies to him.

This, however, was not what Elijah had come to say; a more awful message was in reserve. Such a punishment should fall upon Ahab and all his house as all men would know to be strict justice. His blood should be licked up by the dogs in the very spot where then Naboth's blood was fresh. His house—that is, his family—should be entirely destroyed, and the wicked Jezebel should be a prey to the wild dogs of the town; they should eat her body by the wall of Jezreel.

One truth, which Jezebel would not learn as a warning, she would have to learn as a punishment; namely, the old truth, which was put by St. Paul long afterwards into very plain words: 'The wages of sin is death.'

LESSON 107.

Death of Ahab and Reign of Ahaziah.

PART of Elijah's prophecy against Ahab was not long of fulfilment. Between the time when the kingdom of Israel was divided from that of Judah and the time of Ahab, one of the northern neighbours of Israel had increased greatly in power. This neighbour was Syria, a kingdom whose capital was Damascus. In Solomon's time the northern boundary of the kingdom of Israel was very near the city of Damascus, but after the division of the kingdoms, the kings of Syria had gained, or regained, much territory in that direction, and had pushed their conquests far into the land

of Israel. An important town named Ramoth-Gilead, not far from the Jordan, on the eastern side of that river, was in the possession of the Syrians, and Ahab greatly desired to win it back. So long as that post belonged to Syria, the northern plain of Palestine, the plain or valley of Jezreel, which was and is the most fertile part of the whole country, was not safe from invasion. But Ahab's own forces were not sufficiently strong to enable him to capture the town; therefore he made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, who was then king of Judah. This is the first kind of agreement between the two kingdoms, and when we come to the history of Judah we shall find that it led to very disastrous results. However, for the time, it promised well. Jehoshaphat was willing to join Ahab against Syria, for the extension of Syria was a source of danger to his own kingdom of Judah, as well as to that of Israel. But he refused to start on the expedition until Ahab had inquired of the prophets of God whether it would be successful or not. All the prophets, except one, advised Ahab to go, and assured him that he would prosper; one made horns of iron and pushed with them like an ox, telling Ahab that so he should push the Syrians, and consume them. But there was one prophet unlike the rest, one whom Ahab honoured with his hatred. His name was Micaiah, and he foretold disaster. He said, 'I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, "These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace."'

The one true prophet was not only disregarded, but imprisoned, and ordered to be fed with the bread and water of affliction; the advice of the great number was taken, and the kings with their armies set out for Ramoth-Gilead. On the day of battle Ahab entered into the thick of the fight as a private soldier, leaving Jehoshaphat, in his royal robes, to represent the king. The Syrians did not know that there were two kings in the field, and pressed upon Jehoshaphat to kill him, supposing him to be Ahab. When they discovered their mistake, they gave up the pursuit. But the day was not ended. A chance arrow struck Ahab, spite of his disguise. He was driven off the field, and died in his chariot. At evening a proclamation was made, in almost the words of Micaiah's prophecy: 'Every man to his city, and every man to his own country.'

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, a bad man, even as his father had been. He followed all the ways of his father; he maintained the worship of Baal, and also that of the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. Ahaziah reigned two years, and then died from the effect of a fall from one of his palace-windows. While he was lying ill, he sent messengers to Baalzebub, the god of

Ekron, to inquire whether he would recover, but Elijah met the messengers, and sent them back to the king to tell him that he would surely die. Ahaziah hated Elijah, and determined to kill him, but Elijah was not to be taken. Two companies of soldiers, each of fifty men, were sent to seize him; they entered readily into the king's plans, and were about to use violence to the old prophet; but he called down fire from heaven, and consumed them. A third company was sent under a captain who acted with more reverence for the prophet's office; he came down to them from the hill on which he was sitting, went with them to Ahaziah, and with his own mouth declared to him the nearness of death. Ahaziah died, and was succeeded by Jehoram.

LESSON 108.

Read 2 Kings ii. 1-22.

THE departure of Elijah from this life, of which we have just read the history, was, in its suddenness and strangeness, quite in keeping with the manner in which he had often appeared before those to whom he was sent with messages from God. His whole public life, indeed, so far as we can judge, was one of sudden changes; he would show himself in a certain place, and utter some of his burning words, and then disappear so suddenly and strangely that neither his friends or his enemies knew where to look for him. The author of the Apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus, writing after the completion of the Canon of the Old Testament as we receive it, alludes to this peculiarity in the following words:—'Then stood up Elijah the prophet as fire, and his word burned like a lamp.' Elijah seems to have known that his death would not be like that of other men, and when the time for his departure was at hand, he took with him Elisha, whom he had appointed to be his successor, and, in company with him, visited the schools of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho. At those places we find there were persons who are called 'sons of the prophets,' a name which requires some explanation. As early as the time of Samuel there were established what we should call colleges, in which young men were gathered together, and instructed in some of the knowledge which was necessary for men who were to become preachers of righteousness to the great body of their countrymen. From this we may judge that there were two distinct parts of the work of the prophet; one which could be learnt, namely, the explaining of the spiritual and moral meaning of the Law; and another which could not be learnt or calculated upon beforehand, namely, the delivering to the people of messages received directly from God. The first office was very much like that of our own religious teachers, our ministers of

religion ; the second seems unlike anything that we have now. It was not a power that could be learnt by one man from another, but came directly by the will of God.

Among these sons of the prophets there seems to have been some knowledge, of the future ; both at Bethel and Jericho they told Elisha that the Lord was about to take away his master, meaning Elijah. Elisha's answer, ' Yea, I know it ; hold ye your peace,' was not caused by any annoyance he felt at their speaking to him, but by his own sorrow at knowing that from that day he would no more be able to receive counsel or encouragement from the great prophet. Elisha was a man of a very quiet, gentle disposition, and seems to have feared to undertake the work which would fall upon him when Elijah should be no more. Why Elijah wished Elisha to remain behind him, at each of the places at which they paused, is a question which it is not very easy to answer. The most probable explanation is, that he wished to spare his successor some of the pain of separation, and therefore would have left him among friends, rather than quite alone. But Elisha, like many quiet men, had a great deal of determination ; he would go with his master to the last, and see the very end.

The request which Elisha made to Elijah, that a double portion of Elijah's spirit might rest upon him, also needs an explanation. Without some knowledge of the customs of the Israelites we should think that Elisha wanted to have for himself, to guide him and strengthen him for the discharge of his duties, twice the power which Elijah had possessed. But that is not the meaning. The first-born son of a family among the Israelites had a right to a share of his father's property, twice as large as that which fell to the lot of any other son. Elisha wanted a last recognition from his master of the fact that he was, as we may say, the heir to his office, and that, as if he were Elijah's first-born, he was entitled to more spiritual power than any other of the sons of the prophets. After they had crossed the Jordan, Elijah was walking with Elisha, and they were talking together, when a chariot and horses of fire parted them from each other, and Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind into heaven. He disappeared from the sight of Elisha, and was never seen again.

The ' sons of the prophets,' who received Elisha on his return to Jericho, said, as they saw him coming to them, ' The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.' That was quite true ; the spirit of faith and trust in God was as strong in Elijah's successor as in Elijah himself ; but the form in which it was manifested was very different.

Elijah's work was stern and hard, but in Elisha's work we find scarcely anything of that kind. Nearly all his actions were actions of mercy and blessing : of him we might almost use the words

which our Saviour uttered when contrasting Himself with Elijah—he was not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

LESSON 109.

Read 2 Kings v.

BETWEEN the passage of Scripture which we last read and that which we have read to-day there are some three chapters which show that, although the king of Israel was not a worshipper of the True God, yet he was so convinced of the benefits which his people derived from the presence among them of a prophet of the True God, that he treated the prophet in a friendly and honourable manner. Elisha was quite willing to be friendly, and on more than one occasion he used his power and knowledge for the deliverance of the armies of the Israelites from the attacks of their enemies.

The greatest proofs, however, of the simplicity and kindness of heart of Elisha, are to be found in the chapter which we have now read.

It has already been remarked that between the division of the two kingdoms and the time of Ahab, the kingdom of Syria, situated to the north-east of Palestine, had been increasing very greatly in power and in extent. From some strong positions which the Syrians held on the east of the Jordan, it was easy for them to make sudden descents upon the great plain of Northern Palestine, and in a short time to do great damage. This kind of warfare was continued in the time of Ahab's grandson, Jehoram. In one of their incursions, the Syrians carried away among their captives a little maid, through whose means the great Syrian soldier Naaman heard of the power and goodness of Elisha, and began to have hopes that he might be cured of the dreadful disease of leprosy from which he was suffering. It seemed to the king of Syria that the best way to realise Naaman's hopes would be for him to send a letter to the king of Israel. A matter of such importance would surely be worth the attention of the king. Jehoram, however, although he was on friendly terms with Elisha, was a worshipper of false gods, and took the letter to be an attempt on the part of the king of Syria to force a quarrel upon him. Leprosy was well known to be a disease from which, indeed, men occasionally recovered, but for which doctors had discovered no specific remedy. The king of Syria, so Jehoram thought, might just as reasonably have asked him to raise a dead man to life, as to cure a leper. He felt that he was in evil case, and rent his clothes, as a token of his vexation and grief. But news of the arrival of Naaman, and of the king of Israel's grief, was brought to Elisha,

who knew that he was the man who alone could fulfil the Syrian king's demands. He asked that Naaman might be sent to him; and when Naaman arrived, he gave him, by the mouth of his servant, a command to go to the Jordan, and dip himself in its waters seven times, promising him that then he should recover. Naaman's haughty temper was roused by what he considered the rudeness of Elisha, in sending a message to him instead of coming out to him himself, and also by the simplicity of the means which Elisha commanded him to use. He would have gone away unrelieved if one of his servants had not quietly reasoned with him, telling him that it was quite worth his while to put up with a little apparent rudeness, and to try so simple a plan, if so great a result as his recovery to health might be expected to follow. It could do no harm, and might do much good. We cannot help admiring Naaman's reasonableness in taking such good advice. His temper, indeed, was haughty and hasty, but he was ready to reconsider the matter, and to humble himself before his servants. He went to the Jordan and dipped himself seven times in the water of the river, and was, as Elisha said he would be, restored to perfect health; 'his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child;' that is, it became healthy, and smooth, and soft. His gratitude was now as great as his anger had been a short time before; he went back to Elisha, and came and stood before him. He, the great general, put himself in the position of a servant to the prophet, who, he had lately thought, ought to have done reverence to him. His gratitude was shown, not only to Elisha but to God, by whose power, and in whose name, Elisha had acted. He wanted Elisha to receive costly presents, and expressed his intention henceforth to become a worshipper of Elisha's God.

From this beautiful story we may learn at least one very important moral lesson, namely, the blessedness of humility.

If Naaman had remained obstinately fixed in his pride, which made him at first drive away in anger from Elisha's house, he never would have been cured of his leprosy at all. It was only when he got rid of his pride, and was content to try humbly the means that Elisha commanded him to use, that he derived benefit. Naaman's flesh would not have come again like the flesh of a little child, unless first his heart had become like the heart of a little child.

NOTE.—The contrast between Elijah and Elisha, referred to in the preceding lesson, may be further illustrated here. Elijah, desert-born and bred, appeared only for a few hours at a time among the inhabitants of the settled country, and even then, rarely, if at all, within the walls of a town. Elisha, on the other hand, was a dweller in a town, and, as it appears, in the city where the king dwelt—probably in Samaria. Elisha's house was evidently a place of some size, as is clear from verses 9, 15, and 24.

LESSON 110.

Read 2 Kings ix.

THE words of Elijah concerning the destruction of the whole family of Ahab were not all immediately accomplished, and Ahab's descendants availed themselves of the delay to go on still in the evil course of their father. We have read very little of their evil deeds, but it seems clear that the wicked Jezebel was still the real ruler of the kingdom. Under her, no improvement could be looked for. But the end of Ahab's dynasty was very near, and in the chapter which we have just read we have heard how it was brought about. When Elijah was alone on Mount Horeb, one of the commissions given to him was to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel. This commission had been passed on to Elisha, and was at length carried out. The war between Syria and Israel was still going on, and Ramoth-Gilead, which Ahab had tried in vain to recover, was the place where it was raging with greatest fury. Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, was one of the commanders of the army of the Israelites. Jehoram, the king of Israel, was on the other, that is the western, side of the Jordan, in Jezreel, recovering from wounds which he had received in the war. The main strength of Israel, as of all other nations at that time and for many hundreds of years after, lay in its army. Any revolution, to be successful, must begin by gaining the fighting-men to its side, and so obtaining their help against the established order of things. Elisha showed great tact in selecting so favourable a time for the anointing of a new king. The family of Ahab had no other right to the throne of Israel than the right of the strong arm. Omri, Ahab's father, had been a successful soldier, and had made himself king; if any man had strength and sufficient support from the people to enable him to overthrow Ahab's descendants, he had just as good a right to the throne as any of them. Of course, when any nation has come to such a condition that the succession has to be decided by civil war, that nation is in a dreadful state. But the continuance of bad rulers is even worse than civil war. No course which was entirely free from evil was open to Elisha, or to the people of Israel; but a revolution was a less evil than obedience to such rulers as Ahab, Ahaziah, or Jehoram, which really amounted to submission to Jezebel, whose tools they were. Jehu, the man chosen to be the leader of the revolution, and the first king of the new dynasty, was a man of great energy and determination. Even the furiousness with which he drove the horses of his chariot was an indication of the eagerness of his character, and his desire to get his hard work done. He saw that if it was to be done at all, it must be done at once. The king must be

surprised before any news of the revolt of the army could reach him. This was the reason why Jehu was so anxious that no one should be allowed to leave the camp; and also, why he refused to give any reply to the messengers who were sent to question him, as he drew near to Jezreel. Jehoram had suspicions of Jehu, and went out in his chariot to meet him. The meeting took place on the very spot where Elijah had, long before, uttered his words of warning to Ahab. Naboth's vineyard, indeed, belonged to the royal family, but none of their possessions brought them so much sorrow. The king was in the power of his captain, Jehu, and Jehu was not the man to hesitate for a moment. He drew his bow, and slew the king with an arrow, and paused only long enough to have the dead body thrown into the plot of ground which, in former time, had been the scene of Ahab's wickedness; then he went on to Jezreel, where he was received with taunting words by Jezebel. There is something brutal in the way in which he said, 'Throw her down,' and in which, when she was thrown to the ground, he drove his chariot over her body. All further resistance was out of the question; Jehu entered the palace as king, and when his royal feast was over, he sent men to take up and bury the body of the Queen-mother, Jezebel. But Elijah's words had been fulfilled to the letter. The dogs had eaten the body, so that there was nothing left to bury.

Thus the power of the family of Ahab, which had done more harm to the land than any other family ever did, came to an end, an end as bloody and cruel as their crimes deserved. There are very few, if any, more awful histories in the Bible. And Jehu, who was the chief actor in their destruction, was himself by no means a good man. God can, and often does, use even wicked men as His instruments for the fulfilment of His purposes.

LESSON 111.

The House of Jehu.

On former occasions, when a successful military adventurer had acquired the throne for himself, by the defeat in open battle, or by the secret murder, of the reigning king, one of his first acts had been to secure his own safety by the slaughter of all the family of his deposed or dead rival, so that there might be none to dispute the throne with him. The kingdom of Israel had sunk into a military despotism, and in that condition of a country such acts of cruelty, though they are certainly unjustifiable, are, from the point of view of those who commit them, quite necessary. All the lessons we learn from the history of Israel are lessons of warning, not of example. We can never think it right to destroy a whole family

whose only crime is that their father has been king ; but we ought to remember, that, if the kings of Israel had been only moderately good men, such murders would not have been committed. In previous revolutions the new kings had done such deeds themselves, on their own authority. Jehu wanted to have the whole family of Ahab destroyed, but, with all his eagerness, he had policy enough to wait for a time, and to leave the wicked work to others. He challenged the whole family and all the friends of Ahab to an open fight for the throne, feeling sure that none of them would accept his challenge, and knowing that whatever was done in consequence would be done by them, not by him, and yet would certainly turn to his advantage. The result of his challenge was just what he had expected and hoped, for those persons who were most pledged to the defence of the old royal family, and who had the care of the royal children, yielded to him without any attempt at resistance. To show him how fully they approved of his being king in the place of Jehoram, they brought to him to Jezreel a ghastly present—the heads of seventy descendants, sons and grandsons, of Ahab. He received their submission very gladly, but, at the same time, contrived to put all the blame and guilt of the seventy murders off his own shoulders, and upon theirs: ‘I conspired against my master, and slew him ; but who slew all these?’ A man who could speak in this manner must have been as unscrupulous and cruel as he undoubtedly was clever. The remainder of his reign displayed both these qualities to the fullest degree. Jehu objected to the worship of Baal, not because he loved the Lord God of Israel, but because he knew that the introduction of foreign practices and of foreign teachers was destructive to the nationality of Israel. It was as a cunning politician, not as a God-fearing man, that he desired to rescue his country from Baal-worship. His method of proceeding was quite in keeping with his previous actions. He proclaimed a great feast to Baal, and collected all Baal’s priests, and the chief of those who were his worshippers, in the temple of Baal, declaring that Ahab had served Baal only a little, but that he would serve him much. By such means he gathered all the Baal party together, and separated from them all who differed from them. Then he ordered the doors of the temple to be closed, and, in company with a few men who were in his secret, went in and fell upon them with the sword. The frightful massacre put an end to Baal-worship in Israel. But the means used to accomplish this desirable end were wrong, and therefore Jehu and his family fell under the Divine displeasure.

In Jehu’s time, and still more in the time of Jehoahaz, his son and successor, the Israelites were unsuccessful in the war with Syria. Under Jehu they lost much of their territory, and under

Jehoahaz we are told that the Syrians were so completely their masters that their army was almost destroyed: 'the King of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.'

Jehoahaz was succeeded by his son, Jehoash, or Joash, who was an able warrior, and recovered from Syria great part of the territory which had been lost in the reigns of his father and grandfather. In his time also we find Israel and Judah once more in collision. Ahab had made alliance with the royal family of Judah, which would therefore naturally be hostile to the dynasty which had overthrown Ahab's house. The then King of Judah sent a message to Jehoash, 'Come, let us look one another in the face.' Jehoash answered by a parable: 'The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, "Give thy daughter to my son to wife:" and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle.' The king of Judah would not take the warning which Jehoash intended to convey in this parable; and he and Jehoash did look each other in the face. Jerusalem was taken and plundered, and the king of Judah made prisoner, but was ransomed by the surrender to the conqueror of all the treasures of the Temple of the Lord.

Jeroboam, who was the son of Jehoash, was, like him, an able warrior. His conquests extended northwards and eastwards, till in those directions Israel had reached its old boundaries. Zechariah, Jeroboam's son, succeeded him, but reigned only six months. Then revolutions again began, and succeeded each other very rapidly, until Israel was entirely destroyed.

Of the last king of this family we know little or nothing; the others, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, and Jeroboam (commonly called Jeroboam II.), were among the ablest rulers, if not the very ablest, that the northern kingdom ever had.

LESSON 112.

The Fall of the Kingdom of Israel.

AFTER the defeat and slaughter of Zachariah by Shallum, a time of great confusion and trouble followed. Conspiracy after conspiracy was formed, and with the success of each there was a change of rulers. The real strength of the nation was nearly gone, and the restlessness which all these changes displayed was a sign of the end.

Shallum, who smote Zachariah and reigned in his stead, had scarcely settled himself on the throne, when he was, in his turn, attacked, defeated, and slain by Menahem, in Samaria, after a reign of only one month.

Menahem had a longer reign, and met with some success in wars undertaken for the recovery of territory which had of old belonged to Israel. He took Tipsah, a city on the river Euphrates, which had been the boundary-city of Israel in the north-easterly direction in the days of King Solomon. This success, however, brought Israel into contact with an enemy far more powerful than the Syrians had been when they were at their strongest, namely, the Assyrians. The capital of the Assyrian empire was Nineveh, and its kings were great warriors. Pul, who was king of Assyria in Menahem's time, came against the land of Israel, and made it a subject kingdom. 'Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand.' To obtain the money Menahem had to tax his people to the utmost, and so weakened them still more, when they were quite weak enough already. With this payment of tribute to Assyria the independence of the kingdom of Israel vanished for ever. There was, for some time longer, the name of a kingdom, and its rulers were called kings, but in reality the kingdom was little better than a province of the great Assyrian empire.

After a reign of ten years Menahem died, and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, who reigned two years, and was then deposed and put to death by Pekah, one of his captains. In Pekah's reign Israel was again invaded by the Assyrians under the king Tiglath-Pileser. This time the Assyrians did not depart with money only: they carried away the inhabitants of a large district of northern Palestine, and took them captive to Assyria. The usurper Pekah, after a reign of twenty years, fell before another conspirator, Hoshea the son of Elah, the last king of Israel.

Reference to a map of Asia will show that Palestine is very nearly in a straight line between the chief cities of Assyria and of Egypt. As the power of Israel decayed, that of Assyria on the one hand, and of Egypt on the other, was growing very rapidly. It did not need very much sagacity to discover that, sooner or later, these great rival powers must come to war with each other. Hoshea saw this, and thought that he could gain some advantage to himself from their rivalry. His kingdom was already in some way subject to the empire of Assyria, and he had no hope that he would be able to make any better terms with the Assyrians than those which had been made before his time. As far as Assyria alone was concerned, the nominal existence of Israel could be preserved only by payment of tribute. But Egypt had as yet no hold over Israel, and Hoshea thought that the ruler of Egypt would be willing to guarantee his independence, if he on his part would give the Egyptians help against Assyria. The plan was a clever one, but it was made too late. The king of Assyria found it out before

there had been time for Hoshea to receive any of the benefits he expected from Egypt. He came against Hoshea, and took his capital, Samaria, after a siege of three years; Hoshea was made a prisoner, and his people were carried away captive.

This was the end of the kingdom of Israel, which lasted, from the accession of Jeroboam to the capture of Samaria, two hundred and sixty years.

LESSON 113.

Read 2 Kings xvii. 6—23.

THE few verses which we have now read, are very important indeed. We must bear in mind what they tell us if we wish to understand the moral of the history which has been briefly sketched in our recent lessons. And, what is still more important, they help us to understand not only the moral of the history of the kingdom of Israel, but of other kingdoms as well. Israel was not so much unlike other kingdoms as to be quite an exception to the moral laws according to which nations rise or fall. On the contrary, in the history of Israel we have the nature of those laws shown to us. Trust in God, and obedience to His commandments, are the great sources of national strength; wilfulness and obstinacy, and disregard of God's commandments, are certain causes of weakness and ruin. Applying this principle to the history we have been reading, and especially to the summary of it which we have read to-day, we come to the following conclusion:—The cause of the fall of the kingdom of Israel was not the constant change of rulers, or the disputes with other kingdoms, but those changes and disputes were themselves the results of a cause which is strictly a moral cause. The folly of Rehoboam, and the oppression which he intended and threatened to practise upon the people, were quite sufficient reasons why the ten tribes should refuse to submit to his rule. We are told more than once that God's promise of protection held good for the men of Israel quite as much as for the men of Judah, consequently the separation of the kingdoms was not a sin against God. But the men of Israel and their kings rejected the statutes of God, and His covenant that He made with their forefathers, and therefore all the evils of which we have read came upon them, until they were removed from their land.

From this time we hear no more, either in the Bible or in any other history, of the Ten Tribes, who were, as far as numbers were concerned, the greater part of the descendants of Jacob. A few families, indeed, of several of the tribes seem to have been left behind in Palestine, and to have been mixed with the men of Judah, whose descendants we now call Jews. A few others, it is supposed, were united with the Jews, when the Jews themselves,

several generations later, were carried away captive by the Babylonians. The names of some Jews in England at this day are proofs of their descent from members of these other tribes. But the nation was lost entirely, and nobody knows, or can even guess with any degree of probability, what became of them. It seems unlikely that, in the land to which the Assyrians removed them, they kept themselves apart from the other inhabitants, and if they intermarried with those other inhabitants, Assyrians and Medes, all the trace one could expect now to find of their existence would be some slight difference of feature, and perhaps a word or two of their language. But neither of these traces has been discovered. As a nation, Israel's name was blotted out from under heaven. This is the most terrible instance we know of the punishment of national sins; but we should expect Israel's punishment to be more severe than that of any other people, because Israel's privileges were greater, and Israel's knowledge of God and of God's laws far more full than any other nation of the old world possessed.

LESSON 114.

Read 2 Kings xvii. 24—41.

THE complete disappearance of the Ten Tribes of Israel from all history was a result of a curious custom of the Assyrian conquerors. In modern history, when we read of one nation being entirely conquered by another, we are never sure that we shall not read soon after of an attempt, or several attempts, being made by the conquered people to recover their liberty. Even if such attempts fail, the worst that happens is that the conquered people are obliged to work, to till the soil, and carry on their various trades and occupations, for the advantage of their conquerors instead of for their own. But the Assyrians prevented any attempts of the kind by removing all the population—men, women, and children—of a province they had once subdued, to distant parts of their empire. We do not know that in other respects they were more cruel than other people of the time when they flourished. But such a people as the Israelites, who would have been a constant source of trouble, or even of danger, if they had been allowed to remain all together in their old homes, were reduced to utter helplessness, and therefore to harmlessness, when they were distributed among the cities of the Medes, and scattered in other places beyond the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. The place left vacant in Palestine by the removal of its old inhabitants was filled, according to the same harsh but sagacious policy, by settlers from Mesopotamia and other parts of the Assyrian empire.

The first settlers found their new home not exactly suited to

them; the wild beasts, and particularly the lions, which then abounded in Palestine, destroyed large numbers of them, and they believed that the reason of the calamity was their ignorance of the worship of the God of the country. They sent an embassy to the king of Assyria, telling him of their ill-fortune, and entreating him to send them one of the captive priests, that he might teach them the manner of the God of the land. With this request the king of Assyria complied, and the consequence was the establishment of a curiously mixed religion, partly Mosaic and partly heathen. The mixture was all the more confused because the settlers, who were sent by the Assyrians to dwell in Palestine, were drawn from various cities and provinces, and brought with them the worship of their various gods. The intermarriage of these peoples gave rise also to a people of mixed blood, in which there was a touch of the old Israelite race, derived from the very few Israelites who were either allowed to remain in Palestine, or sent back from captivity.

Thus we find a mixed race of inhabitants with a mixed religion, or, rather a mixture of many religions. To go a little beyond the history we have just read, we find, as we might have expected, that one form of religion prevailed to a certain extent over the others. The men of Babylon—that is, the settlers who came from Babylon—blended the worship of Jehovah with that of their own gods; the settlers from Sepharvaim blended the same worship of Jehovah with that of Adrammelech and Anammelech, and so on. The religion which was partly held by all, that is, the worship of Jehovah, in time gained ascendancy over the others. So that, at last, northern Palestine was inhabited by people whose blood was a mixture of most of the nations of western Asia, and whose religion was only in some small particulars distinguishable from that of the descendants of Jacob.

The name by which these people are known in later history is that of Samaritans. The Jews, that is, the men of Judah or Southern Palestine, were bitterly hostile to these new settlers. In religion they were too much alike to forget their small differences, and in blood the Jews regarded the Samaritans as utterly vile and worthless. The Jews of later times had other causes for cherishing and displaying hostility towards the Samaritans, an hostility which the Samaritans, on their part, were not slow in returning. The result was a lasting feud. In the New Testament we read that 'the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans;' also that when the Jews wished to show most forcibly their hatred of our Saviour they called him a Samaritan; and that when, on one of His journeys, Jesus would have entered into a Samaritan village, the Samaritans would not receive Him, 'because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem.'

All these disagreements and many others arose from that settlement of which we have read the history to-day.

LESSON 115.

Read 2 Chronicles xii.

HAVING gone to the end of the history of the kingdom of Israel, we can now return to that of the kingdom of Judah, which we shall be able to read continuously. The kingdom of Judah, indeed, has long ceased to exist as a kingdom, but the people have never been lost as those of Israel have been; very many of the Jews of our own time, who live among other peoples and nations, but always keep themselves separate, and still observe many of the customs of the Law of Moses, can trace their descent from men who were alive while David's descendants were still kings of Judah. The very name of Jew means a descendant of Judah, and though a few of other tribes were mingled with them after the division of the kingdoms, and a few more during the Captivity, the great majority are really what the name Jew implies.

Rehoboam, when his folly and insolence had driven the ten tribes into revolt, established himself as securely as he could on the throne of the small kingdom formed of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The men of those two tribes must have been both numerous and brave, for we find that, more than once, they met all the power of the ten tribes on equal terms. Such a conflict was imminent early in the reign of Rehoboam, but he was bidden by Shemaiah the prophet to dismiss his army, and let the ten tribes alone, because 'that thing,' the separation of the kingdoms, was of God.

Rehoboam, however, used the peace which followed as unwisely as possible. His foolishness was not, as we sometimes think, the consequence only of youth and inexperience. He was forty-one years old when Solomon died, but he had not learnt, and never did learn, wisdom. The Priests and Levites, the ministers of religion, left the northern tribes and gave a moral strength to the southern kingdom. For three years all went well, but at the end of that time, the king and all his people forsook the Law of the Lord, and encouraged in Judah all the worst abominations of the heathen. This wickedness brought punishment upon Rehoboam and his people.

Shishak, king of Egypt, came up to fight against Judah, bringing with him so large an army that resistance to his demands was hopeless. All the chief men of Judah collected themselves in Jerusalem, thinking that they might defend that one town at least. But Shemaiah, the prophet, came to them with a message from

God, 'Thus saith the Lord, ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak.'

Trouble brought repentance; the king and the princes humbled themselves before God, and desired Him to turn away punishment from them. This humiliation was to a certain extent accepted by God, and He promised to save them from utter destruction; but for their own sakes He would not let them go altogether unpunished.

Those words which we have read in the 8th verse of chapter iii., 'Nevertheless they shall be his (Shishak's) servants; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries,' are a brief expression of what we may call the divine philosophy of history. But they apply to persons as well as to nations. No man and no people is made for self-pleasing; some kind of service, or obedience, is exacted from all: if they refuse the service of God, which is 'perfect freedom,' they must know by the loss of freedom what it is to serve hard masters.

Shishak departed from Jerusalem, but not without a heavy tribute; he took away the treasures of the Temple, and of the king's house, and the golden shields which Solomon had made for his body-guard. It seems to be characteristic of Rehoboam, and to show his foolish fondness for display, that he replaced these golden shields by shields of brass. He had lost the valuable part of his treasures, but would have an imitation of what he had lost, rather than show himself to his people with less state and ceremony.

The lesson which this humiliation ought to have taught Rehoboam was not learnt by him; though the people as a whole seem to have profited by it. 'In Judah,' we read, 'things went well.' But the king's character, as it is summed up by the compiler of the Chronicles, who evidently wished to speak as well of Rehoboam as he could truthfully, is such a character as no one would choose to deserve: 'He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.'

LESSON 116.

Kings of Judah to Jehoshaphat.

REHOBAM was succeeded by his son Abijah, who was a man of much more determination and ability. He resolved to reunite, if he could, the separated kingdoms, and appealed to the men of Israel, on the ground of the promise of allegiance which their forefathers had made to David. His speech, as recorded in the Second Book of Chronicles, is a strange mixture of truth and falsehood, but he seems to have believed it himself. However, the speech was not effectual for its purpose: the reunion, if it was ever to take place, must be the result of conquest. In the battle which ensued between

Jeroboam and Abijah, the latter was victorious, and succeeded in adding a part of Jeroboam's dominions to his own. But this was only a temporary advantage. The northern kingdom was not to be crushed. The reign of Abijah was too short for the completion of any large scheme of conquest.

Asa, Abijah's successor, is in almost as strong contrast with him as he was with his father Rehoboam. Asa was a man of peace, and for ten years the land was quiet. That is to say, there were no wars, but Asa had much hard work to do at home. The carelessness and folly of the first king of Judah, and the ambition of the second, had been equally unfavourable to the progress or even the maintenance of true religion. The land was full of abominable idols; the Temple worship, with its sacrifices to God, had been suspended, and the Temple itself so neglected that the altar had fallen into decay.

A prophet, named Azariah, spoke to Asa in the name of the Lord, and warned him of the evils which would surely fall upon the land if still the people forsook God, but gave him at the same time great encouragement to seek God, by assuring him that God was willing to be found of them who seek Him.

Asa gathered his own people, and invited all the pious and well-disposed of the other tribes to join them, and proposed that they should all renew the covenant with the Lord God of their fathers. The covenant was made, and the oath was taken by the king and all the people, with the greatest enthusiasm. The work of reformation was very thorough: high station was held to be no excuse for ungodliness. Maachah, the queen-mother, was deposed from her exalted rank, because she was an idolatress, and the image which she worshipped was burnt.

In Asa's old age he committed one or two foolish acts, and reaped the natural consequences of his folly. He was attacked by the king of Israel, and instead of keeping to the terms of his covenant, and trusting in God, and withal doing what he could to help himself, he bribed the king of Syria to attack Israel on the other side, and so divert their attack from him. Asa's wealth became at once a source of annoyance; the remaining six years of his reign were years of war with those people whose covetousness his bribe given to the Syrians had excited.

The next king, Jehoshaphat, is he of whom we have already heard something in the history of the kingdom of Israel. He was a good man, and on the whole a good and prudent king, but he made one fatal mistake, which did great harm to his kingdom. He took as wife for his son Ahab's daughter Athaliah, a woman who inherited all the worst parts of the character of her mother Jezebel. He also made a political alliance with Ahab,

and was with him when he was killed in the battle with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead.

Of the early part of Jehoshaphat's reign the most notable event is the commencement of a scheme for the education of the people. He seems to have believed that a great part of their transgressions of God's laws arose from sheer ignorance of what those laws were. Consequently, as soon as he had completed the outward reformation commenced by his father Asa, 'in the third year of his reign, he sent to his princes,' giving them orders 'to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites and Priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the Law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.'

It is an interesting fact, and worth remembering, that when teachers are giving and scholars learning lessons from the Bible, on our duty to God and to our neighbours, we are following the example set, nearly three thousand years ago, by the good King Jehoshaphat.

LESSON 117.

Read 2 Chron. xx. 1-30.

THE passage which we have just read is one which illustrates the great truth that religion is the source of all true strength, whether to a man or a nation.

Jehoshaphat's unwise alliance with Ahab had brought upon him reproaches, which he well deserved, from the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani. The evil consequences of that alliance were not felt so much in Jehoshaphat's house as in that of his descendants. The contrast which was forced upon him between his own desires and those of Ahab produced one reform. Ahab disregarded justice, and used the forms of law only to carry out his unjust schemes. Jehoshaphat, on the contrary, loved justice, and, to ensure justice being done to his people, he appointed judges throughout the land. There is nothing about this in the passage which we have just read, but it has an important bearing upon the interpretation of the passage.

It was in Jehoshaphat's time that the first great alliance of those eastern tribes of robbers, who had been repressed by David, was made against the heirs to David's throne. The Moabites and Ammonites, and others, joined themselves together to fight against Jerusalem. The danger to Jehoshaphat and his people lay in the numbers of the invading hosts. Even if the first part of the army were defeated, their places could be readily supplied by the countless multitudes in the rear. The attack, moreover, was completely unprovoked. The war with the Ammonites in David's reign was

undertaken only to avenge a wanton and brutal insult offered by them to David's ambassadors. With that single exception, there had been peace between the children of Israel and their kindred, the descendants of Lot and Esau. That, without any cause, the Ammonites should assail the kingdom of Judah, seemed to Jehoshaphat a gross violation of justice. Within his own territories he had taken care that justice should be administered, and the prayer which, in the name of all his people, he offered to God, was a prayer that justice might be done, and that mere force might not to be allowed to prevail over right. The last words of the prayer show this most clearly: 'O our God, wilt Thou not *judge* them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.' By the mouth of a prophet of God an answer was speedily given, the main point of which was, 'The battle is not yours, but God's.' The scene which followed is most extraordinary. The people, who, a few hours before, had been weeping and lamenting, had such trust in God's word and in His righteousness, that they began to sing aloud praises to God, as if they had already won the battle. And on the next day, when they went out to meet their enemies, those who led the march of the army, instead of being the most valiant and strong of the soldiers, were singers who were appointed to lead the praises of the army, and to sing, 'Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever.'

At the moment when the sound of this hymn of praise fell upon the ears of the invading army, a strange panic seized them. Their minds became so confused that each division of the army took another division for their enemies, and attacked them with such fury and obstinacy that, by mutual slaughter, their rout was completed before the army of the Jews arrived. The deliverance was manifestly wrought out for His people by God Himself, and to Him, therefore, they ascribed all the praise and glory. In reading this narrative we may well be reminded of a famous event in our own history, namely, the destruction of the great Armada, in Queen Elizabeth's reign. In that case, however, the work was begun by men, but completed by the winds and the waves. Still, the feeling of the English nation, when their enemies were scattered, may be very accurately compared with that of Jehoshaphat and the Jews, on the occasion of which we have been reading. The gratitude of the people was felt to be due to God alone; and a medal, which commemorated the deliverance of our country, bore these words: 'The Lord blew upon them, and they were scattered.'

The good result of this defeat of the enemies of Judah was lasting. Other nations heard how God had put forth His own power to deliver His people, and were in consequence afraid to attack them.

‘So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.’

LESSON 118.

Judah's Idolatries.

IMMEDIATELY after the death of Jehoshaphat the evil effects of his alliance with Ahab began to show themselves. Jehoram, his eldest son and his successor in the kingdom, put into practice those wicked arts which, through his wife Athaliah, he had learnt from the idolatrous princes of Israel. His first act, as soon as he had taken possession of the throne, was to secure himself from all possible rivals, by murdering his brothers, and seizing upon the wealth left to them by their father. Then he introduced into Judah the worship of Baal, which was surrounded with all kinds of impure and wicked rites. He was warned of the evil of his ways by Elijah the prophet, who sent to him his only written prophecy, or at least the only written prophecy which has been preserved. In a letter Elijah told Jehoram that, as a punishment for his sins, for his idolatry, and the murder of his brothers, who were better men than himself, his people, his children, his wives, and all his goods, would be smitten by the Lord with a great plague, and that he himself would die of a loathsome disease. All this came to pass. The Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah; and the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah, ‘and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.’ Then Jehoram died. This character is given of him: ‘He wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord.’ ‘He reigned eight years in Jerusalem, and departed without being desired.’

Jehoahaz, more commonly called Ahaziah,¹ his youngest son, succeeded him, and followed his evil ways: ‘for his mother (Athaliah) was his counsellor to do wickedly.’ This Ahaziah was the man of whom we have heard something in the history of Israel. He was with his kinsman Jehoram, king of Israel, when Jehu's revolution put an end to the dynasty of Ahab, and was slain by Jehu at the same time as Jehoram was. The death of Ahaziah put a terrible power into the hands of his wicked mother, and she used it terribly. She determined to be queen of Judah, and to gain that end she murdered all the members of the royal family, except one, a

¹ It may be explained to the elder scholars that many Jewish names are compounds of other roots with the sacred name of God, ‘Jehovah’ or ‘Jah.’ In this case the roots are put together in two ways: ‘Jeho-ahaz,’ in which the sacred

name comes first; and Ahaz-iah,’ in which it comes last. The meaning of both forms is the same, ‘the possession of Jehovah.’ A similar variation occurs in the names ‘Jehoiachin.’--‘Jechon-iah.’

child, named Joash, who was rescued by his aunt, and kept safe hidden for six years. At the end of six years, during which Athaliah had ruled over Judah, the high priest Jehoiada, uncle of the young Joash, determined to appeal to the loyalty of the people of Judah, and, if he could secure their help, to overthrow the wicked queen. He told his plans, which he had formed very skilfully, to some of the chief men of Judah, and with them brought the young prince from his hiding-place into the Temple of God, where they anointed him with oil, and put a crown upon his head, and cried, 'God save the king!' Athaliah heard the people's shouts, for they all were glad to have once more a prince of the house of David for their ruler, and so she went to the Temple to see what was the reason of the shouting. At the sight of the young king surrounded by his friends she said, 'Treason, treason!' but they knew that she had been only a usurper, and that the right to reign belonged to Joash: they took her and put her to death. Jehoiada, in the name of the child-king, made a covenant between him and the people that they should serve God. So a kind of reformation began, but did not last very long. During the life of Jehoiada, both king and people were faithful to their covenant; but when Jehoiada was dead, king Joash forgot all his wise counsels, and forsook the law of God. His own cousin, Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, who was a prophet, rebuked him for his wickedness, but was stoned in the very courts of the Temple by the command of Joash. The deed of ingratitude and wickedness did not go unavenged. By the armies of the Syrians great losses were inflicted upon Judah, and the king Joash himself was murdered in his bed by his own servants.

Amaziah, who succeeded Joash, had a reign which was very much like his father's. At first he feared God, and was successful both in his government at home and in wars with some of the old enemies of the Jews. But his success made him proud. He forsook the law of God, and did evil in His sight, and so came to an unhappy end. This change from a youth and early manhood of piety and justice to an old age of wickedness and folly is hard to understand; but it happened also to Uzziah, who succeeded Amaziah. Uzziah was strong so long as he was good. He sought the Lord, and God made him prosper. But he too was overcome with pride, and died in misery.

Jotham, the next king, was more consistent in good ways, except that he did not reform his people, but let them do corruptly.

Ahaz, who succeeded him, was also consistent, but he was consistent in wickedness. In his time, the Assyrians came against Judah, and distressed the country sore. Ahaz tried to bribe the Assyrian king by gifts, out of the treasures of the Temple and of his own palace. The Assyrian king took the gifts, but gave Ahaz

no help. At last Ahaz tried to propitiate the false gods of Damascus, but neither from them did he gain any help: on the contrary; 'they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.'

Judah seemed to be at the very brink of destruction, but the fall of the kingdom was delayed by the work of one good king, namely, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz.

LESSON 119.

The Reformation under Hezekiah.

THE history of the kingdom of Judah under Hezekiah is a proof of how much good may be done to a country by a good king who has wise advisers. Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and showed his desire for the reformation of his people by the very first act he performed. The Temple of God in Jerusalem had been neglected and defiled ever since the time of Jehoshaphat. Even Jotham, the one good king who came between Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, had 'not gone up to the house of the Lord.' Hezekiah was grieved to see how the Temple had been neglected, and, in the first month of the first year of his reign, he set about the work of making it fit for public worship. The priests and the Levites, to whom he gave the command to cleanse and sanctify the Temple, carried out their work thoroughly, and then the king repeated the dedication of the building to God's worship in a manner very similar to that which Solomon had used when he first built it. The people of Judah were taken with their king's enthusiasm, and he, on his part, rejoiced at the readiness of the people; for the thing was done suddenly. But Hezekiah was not contented that the men of Judah alone should enjoy the privilege of worshipping God according to the law given to their fathers. He remembered that the men of Israel, although they had long been separated from the men of Judah, were still their brethren, and therefore he sent messengers throughout the towns and cities of Israel, to invite any who were willing to come to Jerusalem, and join with the Jews in celebrating the feast of the Passover, which was instituted to commemorate the deliverance of the whole people from the land of Egypt, but which had not been held for many years. Such an invitation would have caused a great deal of jealousy a few years before; but, at the time we are now reading about, the conquest of Israel by the Assyrians had begun, and those who were left in the land had no time, even if they had had the heart, to think of jealousies. Many of the Israelites mocked the messengers of King Hezekiah, but divers, that is, certain few, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

The Temple was now ready for the worship of the true God, but Hezekiah would not commence the feast, until he and the people

with him had destroyed the images and the shrines of the false gods, which had so long been revered. At the same time there was destroyed one relic of the past history of Israel, which, we may be sure, Hezekiah would have preserved, if he could have done so without harm. The serpent of brass, which Moses had made and placed on a pole when the fiery flying serpents were killing the Israelites in the wilderness, had been kept at Jerusalem. The people, who were very prone to idolatry, worshipped this brazen serpent, as if it, and not God, had delivered their forefathers from death. That which ought to have awakened gratitude to God had become to the Jews a substitute for God, and therefore Hezekiah could not hesitate. He broke it in pieces, calling it 'Nehushtan,' a word which signifies 'a bit of brass.'

When this work was finished, the people of Judah, and the few who were with them from the northern tribes, began the Passover. There was great reason to fear, indeed it was quite certain, that many of those who came to that passover feast had not purified themselves according to the strict commands of the law. But Hezekiah did not therefore forbid their partaking of the feast. He was far too wise a man, and had in Isaiah, the prophet, far too wise an adviser, to do such a thing as that. He knew that what God required of His people was the worship of their hearts, and that when men's hearts were true, the mere outward forms were of secondary importance. Therefore he allowed them all to join in the sacred feast, and then offered on their behalf a prayer, which is one of the most wise and true that we can read. 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And God, we are told, heard his prayer. But God did more for Hezekiah than hearing his prayer for those who came to the Passover. He gave to Hezekiah, as He often gives to those who serve Him truly, a bold and valiant heart. The power of Assyria was being felt by Judah as well as by Israel. The gift which Ahaz offered to the king of Assyria did him no good, and did harm to his people. The Assyrians looked upon Judah as a dependent state, which they could absorb into their own empire whenever they might choose to do so. But Hezekiah thought otherwise. At the very time when Shalmaneser and Sargon were taking city after city in Israel, and sending away their inhabitants into captivity in the land of the Medes, Hezekiah, trusting in the help of the Lord, rebelled against the king of Assyria, and refused to pay him any further tribute. His trust was not a false trust. The king of Assyria left him in possession of his throne, and did not even attempt to subdue him again for more than ten years. How he fared in that attempt we shall read in the next lesson.

LESSON 120.

Read 2 Kings xix.

It was said in the last lesson that Hezekiah determined to shake off the yoke of the king of Assyria, and with that purpose refused to continue payment of the tribute. It was also said that the king of Assyria did not, for some time, make any attempt to subdue Hezekiah, and bring him under his power again. At last, however, more than ten years after Hezekiah's assertion of his independence, the new king of Assyria, named Sennacherib, appeared in Judah, with an army which all the forces that Hezekiah could raise were unable to resist. One after another the fortified towns of the kingdom of Judah fell into the hands of the Assyrians, and Hezekiah, losing heart, and fearing that Jerusalem also would be taken, sent an embassy to Sennacherib, confessing his fault, and offering to pay any tribute that Sennacherib might appoint. In this matter Hezekiah acted unwisely, on his own opinion of the case, and without consulting Isaiah, who had before given him good advice. The sum of money which Sennacherib named was so great that Hezekiah could not raise it without undoing some of the work which he had done to beautify the Temple of God. He was obliged to cut off the golden plates with which he had overlaid the doors of the Temple. And, after all, he found that he had gained no real advantage. The king of Assyria chose to consider the treasure which Hezekiah had sent him as a payment for delay only, and not for an entire cessation of hostilities. Sennacherib sent an army, or a division of his army, to Jerusalem, and commanded his generals to endeavour to weaken the people's trust both in their God and their king. The generals readily undertook the task, and addressed the Jews in words full of scorn against God and of accusations against Hezekiah. They told the people not to trust in the Lord, because their trust would be in vain; but rather to submit themselves to the king of Assyria, and receive from him favourable terms. Neither the people nor any of the officers of Hezekiah made any reply to the words of the Assyrian general, but went back to their master in grief, and told him all that the Assyrian had said. Hezekiah, at this time, sent for counsel to Isaiah, and received from him consolation and encouragement. The king of Assyria should not prevail over Jerusalem: so Isaiah declared, in God's name; and the events which occurred immediately afterwards at some distance from Jerusalem, gave Hezekiah patience and confidence. The main body of the Assyrian army was needed elsewhere; but, before Sennacherib departed from Judah, he sent Hezekiah a letter, in which he said that he would soon return, and do all that he had threatened to do.

Hezekiah again had recourse to a surer counsel than that of his own thoughts. He laid the letter before God, and prayed to God for help. God's answer was sent to him by the mouth of Isaiah.

Isaiah's answer, which we have read to-day, is a magnificent piece of poetry, but to Hezekiah it was far more than that. It assured him that, although his case seemed quite hopeless, it was not really so, for God had not deserted him. Indeed, some parts of the poem are more like a song of triumph than a message of comfort to a nation in sorrow. The king and the people had rent their clothes, and, for very shame and sorrow, had given no reply to the Assyrian. But the prophet's song said to the king of Assyria, 'The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.'

The deliverance which was granted to Jerusalem was altogether beyond human power or expectation. Some power of the Lord inflicted death upon the whole Assyrian army which Sennacherib had left in Judah, or between Judah and Egypt; and Sennacherib himself never returned, for he was murdered at Nineveh.

Lord Byron has written a very fine poem on this event, a few verses of which may be quoted here :—

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.
Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.
For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heav'd, and for ever grew still!

And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the Temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Independently of its bearing on the history of Judah, this chapter contains a very important lesson on God's government of all the earth. The Jews were tempted to believe that they alone were the objects of God's providence; but Isaiah's prophecy (verses 25-27) shows plainly that the success of Sennacherib and the increase of the Assyrian power formed part of God's plan for the

world. The empire of Assyria, as will be afterwards explained, was an empire of immense extent and almost incalculable wealth; this, as Isaiah teaches us, was because God intended it to be so, and had work for it to do. Yet it was a power founded on tyranny, and built up with cruelty; which proves, if we look at it well, how irresistible God's will is; for He can use, and does use, not only good men, but bad men, to fulfil His purposes.

LESSON 121.

From the Destruction of Sennacherib's Army to the Death of Josiah.

AFTER the destruction of Sennacherib's army the kingdom of Judah was in safety. But in a short time Hezekiah fell ill, and was at the point of death, but on his earnest prayers he was raised up again, and lived fifteen years longer.

During the whole of his reign the religious condition of Judah was, to all appearance, just what it ought to be. There was no idolatry in the land, and the ordinances of the Mosaic Law were observed more strictly than they ever had been observed before. But the reformation was not very deep. The people observed the outward forms of religion, but their faith in God was nearly gone. This was the main subject of Isaiah's preaching and writing for all those years. In God's name he said: 'This people draw near to Me with their mouth and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.' Of course it was a good thing that the people were even outwardly good; but Hezekiah's death showed how much his precepts had to do with the goodness of the people.

He was succeeded by Manasseh, who was in most things his direct opposite. In a very short time the whole work of the reformation was undone. Manasseh brought back the worship of Baal and the other false gods, whose shrines and images his father had destroyed, and went further in his impiety than any king who had preceded him. He even had the hardihood to set up an idol and to perform idolatrous worship in the Temple of God at Jerusalem. He 'made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen.' 'And the Lord spake unto Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken.' The Assyrians again invaded Judah, and prevailed over it, taking away Manasseh himself as a prisoner to Babylon. In his captivity, so one account informs us, he repented of his evil deeds, and was restored to his kingdom.

After that time he tried to undo the evil he had done, and in part succeeded. But all was not set right when he died, and was

succeeded by Amon, his son, whose history, written in the second book of Chronicles, is brief enough to be given at full. 'He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them, and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house.'

There can be no doubt that, if the power of Assyria had been as great at this time as it was a few years before, the death of Amon would have been the end of the kingdom of Judah. But there were good reasons why the Assyrians could not interfere; and so, although Josiah, the son of Amon, was quite a child, he was made king of Judah, and had a long and on the whole prosperous reign of thirty-one years. It was fortunate for him that his father died when he was so young, and left him to be trained by better men. At the age of sixteen, Josiah began to seek after the God of David; at twenty, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry; and at twenty-six, to restore the Temple of God. In the cleaning out of the Temple, Josiah's workmen found a copy of the Law of Moses, which seems to have been entirely forgotten and neglected in the evil days which had followed the death of good Hezekiah. They carried the book to the king, who read it, and was sore grieved to find that the Law contained such solemn threats against those children of Israel who should disobey it. Josiah knew that disobedience to the Law had been the characteristic of most of his ancestors, and was anxious to find out whether there was any way of escape from the punishment it threatened. A number of the king's chief counsellors were sent to consult the prophetess Huldah, and received from her the terrible news that it was too late for repentance. The king Josiah, she told them, should die before the utmost evil came, but the people had sinned so grievously and so constantly that there was no hope for them. From that day the shadow of death gathered more thickly round the kingdom. Josiah still did all he could do to make the people obedient to God; but their hearts were so set upon idolatry that nothing could cure them, short of the complete ruin of their nation.

At last Josiah's end came, sadly and strangely. The king of Egypt was about to make war against Assyria, and on his march passed close by Josiah's dominions. He sent ambassadors to Josiah, telling him frankly that his quarrel was not with him, but Josiah would not hearken to his words. He went out against Pharaoh Necho into the valley of Megiddo—the place of which we have heard before by the name of 'the Plain of Jezreel,' and

there he was slain. The people, when they had lost Josiah, knew that a good man was gone; they made very great lamentation over him, brought him dead to Jerusalem, and buried him there. The lamentation over Josiah, which was led by the prophet Jeremiah, was in truth the lamentation of the Jews over the extinction of the monarchy which was founded by Saul, and which had then lasted from the division of the kingdoms three hundred and seventy years. We do not reckon it as actually dead for about twenty years more, but its real life departed with that of its last good king.

LESSON 122.

The Fall of Judah, and Destruction of Jerusalem.

THE kingdom of Judah lost all its independence at the death of Josiah. Four kings, of all of whom it is said that they 'did evil in the sight of the Lord,' followed Josiah; but they were kings only in name, for they were subject to the king of Egypt or to the king of Babylon all the time. At first, Egypt was successful in the war with Assyria, and Pharaoh Necho, having defeated Josiah at Megiddo, claimed the disposal of his kingdom. The people had made Jehoahaz their king, but he had reigned only three months when Pharaoh Necho deposed him, and made Eliakim, his brother, king in his stead. Jehoahaz was carried into Egypt, and died there. Eliakim, or Jehoiakim—for Pharaoh gave him that name when he placed him on the throne—was a faithful servant of the king of Egypt, and paid him all the tribute he demanded, raising the money for that purpose by heavy taxes.

In the middle of Jehoiakim's reign the fortune of the war between Egypt and Assyria turned, and the Assyrians recovered all that the Egyptians had taken from them, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt. Judah, being under tribute to Egypt, was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and Jehoiakim became his servant. But after three years he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and was treated as he might have expected. Nebuchadnezzar came against him again, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. His son, Jehoiachin, a youth of eighteen years of age, succeeded to the title of king, but in three months he also was deposed, and carried captive to Babylon. With the captivity of Jehoiachin commenced the captivity of Judah; for we are told that Nebuchadnezzar carried away 'all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained save the poorest sort of the people of the land.'

But still it pleased the conqueror to have a nominal king in Jerusalem: he conferred that title upon an uncle of Jehoiachin, named Zedekiah. Zedekiah was both weak and ambitious; he could

not be contented to be servant of the king of Babylon, but he had no power to contend with him, or even to keep his own citizens in Jerusalem from quarrelling one with another. Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar was rebuked sternly by the prophet Jeremiah, who said that the supremacy of Babylon was designed by God for the true reformation of the Jews. Zedekiah would not listen to the prophet, but caused him to be put in prison. Jerusalem was not well enough provisioned to resist such a siege as was brought against it by Nebuchadnezzar; after a siege of eighteen months, during which great hardships were endured within the walls, the garrison made a sortie and fled. They were pursued by the besiegers, and overtaken at Jericho. Zedekiah was punished for his revolt, by being compelled to witness the execution of his sons, and then having his own eyes put out—a cruel punishment, but not uncommon at that time. The revolt had also another consequence; the Jews were proved unworthy to have even the name of independence, or a native ruler, or a city of their own. Nebuchadnezzar sent his general, Nebuzaradan, to destroy the walls of Jerusalem, which had up to that time been the strongest fortress in Palestine. Nebuzaradan completed his task, and also burnt the Temple, having first taken out of it all that was worth removal, or could be removed. The remainder of the Jews, a few poor persons excepted, who were left to be vinedressers and husbandmen, were at the same time driven into exile. Jerusalem was in ruins, the Temple burnt, the people captives. David's kingdom, even in name, was for ever at an end.

The few of the poorer classes who were left in Palestine were put under the command of a governor, named Gedaliah, who acted wisely and prudently, until a conspiracy was made against him, in which he was slain, and the guard which he had, of Jews and Babylonians, killed. Taking all this history together, we can only find one moral, and that is best expressed in the words of the Bible: 'Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh,¹ according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.'

LESSON 123.

Assyria and Babylon, i.

TOWARDS the end of their independent existence, the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah were brought into contact and collision with

¹ Manasseh occupies the post of dishonour, because it was he who frustrated all the work of Hezekiah's

reformation, and made that of Josiah unavailing.

the forces of two great empires—the Assyrian and the Babylonian. The capital of the former was Nineveh, that of the latter Babylon. These two cities were of very great antiquity, for we find them mentioned in the Bible before the call of Abraham. But we are quite unable to give an account of all their history from that very early time; and indeed, for our purposes, it will be sufficient to state what we know of them, and of the empires of which they were the capitals, when their influence began to be felt by Israel.

1. *Assyria and the Assyrians.*—On the banks of the River Tigris there exist, over a space of several miles, great mounds of earth, one of the largest of which is called by the Arabs of the country Birs Nimroud, or the Mound of Nimrod. Many of these mounds have been excavated, and the remains of houses, palaces, temples, etc., have been found. The conclusions which learned men have reached, after a careful examination of these remains, are all that we can set down here.

First, with regard to the people. It is believed that the Assyrians belonged to the same family of nations as the Egyptians and many African races; that is to say, that they were descendants of Ham. The sculptures and paintings which remain enable us to form a good idea of their personal appearance. They were tall, strong, handsome men, and generally wore long black beards. That they were very warlike we find from the Bible history, as well as from the pictures and sculptures, a very great number of which are representations of battle-scenes. Their language appears to have been not altogether unlike that of the Israelites, but there were differences between the two languages quite sufficient to prevent the two peoples understanding each other. The manner of writing used by the Assyrians was very strange. They represented letters by groups of small arrow-heads differently arranged.¹ From the form of these elements of the characters, that of arrow-heads, or of wedges, the writing is generally called ‘cuneiform’ or wedge-shaped, and the term ‘cuneiform inscriptions’ is in very common use.

Some of the inscriptions on the walls of the ruined palaces of Nineveh have been deciphered, and have been found to agree remarkably with certain parts of the history of Israel, as given in the Bible.

The religion of the Assyrians was a worship of the heavenly bodies and the powers of nature. They represented those powers under the form of strangely-imagined animals, such as bulls with

¹ As an illustration of this point, I have used, and found intelligible, the manner in which letters are made by the common needle telegraph — so many dashes to the

right and so many to the left, &c. The signs are all the same, but their different combinations make the different letters.

wings, or lions with human heads. Everything seems to show that they looked upon mere force and strength as the highest quality of their gods, and very little trace is left of anything like reverence for goodness. Fear and awe are the feelings which even now the remains of their immense temples are wont to inspire.

From their admiration of strength there arose a desire to make all their public buildings, such as palaces and temples, of great size. On the construction of these public buildings the Assyrians, like the Egyptians, used to employ their prisoners of war. Pictures have been discovered representing the building of a temple by gangs of slaves, under the direction of Assyrian taskmasters. A curious proof of the Assyrian admiration of strength and size is furnished by these pictures. The difference in height and bulk between the slaves and the taskmasters (and, in other pictures, between Assyrian kings and captives brought before them) is so great that, if we supposed the proportions to be correct, we should have to infer, either that the Assyrians were giants, or that the captives were dwarfs. For reasons which it would be too long to state, both of these suppositions must be rejected, and so we are driven to the conclusion that the Assyrian artists painted their own countrymen many sizes larger than they actually were, in order that they might show how very much superior, in their opinion, they were to their captives.

The government of Assyria was a pure despotism. The king was looked upon almost as a god. The will of the monarch was the law for all his subjects. He had power of life and death over them, and could demand from them any service he pleased. But the direct government of the Assyrian king did not extend very far from the capital, Nineveh. The more distant provinces were put under the control of princes, who, with the exception that they were obliged to pay tribute to the Great King, and to allow his troops at any time to pass through their dominions, were independent kings. This, we may remember, was the condition of the kings of Judah during the time of Sennacherib, when the Assyrian empire was at its greatest height of power.

NOTE.—For fuller details on the matters treated in this lesson I may refer teachers to articles on Assyria and Nineveh in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' and to Mr. Layard's well-known work on Nineveh.

LESSON 124.

Assyria and Babylon, ii.

2. *Babylon*.—The capital of the Babylonian empire was situated upon the River Euphrates, not very far from the place where that river is joined by the Tigris. The home province of Babylon was between the two rivers, and embraced the southern part of that

great plain between the Euphrates and the Tigris, which we generally call Mesopotamia.

The ruins of Babylon do not enable us to draw any satisfactory conclusions with regard to the condition and politics of the people, but the loss is to some extent supplied by accounts which have been preserved, and which were written by the Greek historian, Herodotus. From him we learn that the inhabitants of Babylon were a very luxurious people, and that in the worship of their gods they were given to the commission of impure rites and ceremonies. At one time of their history they were a warlike people, but their luxury led to degeneracy and loss of power, so that at length they were utterly subdued by the Medes and Persians. A brief account of the Medo-Persian conquest of Babylon may be read in the Book of Daniel.

Among the relics of the past which have been discovered at Babylon and brought to Europe are large numbers of sun-baked, or rather sun-dried bricks, which, although they were made about 2,500 years ago, still bear on them the name of the king by whose commands they were used for building. The name on almost all of them is that of Nebuchadnezzar; this fact shows how true was the boast which Nebuchadnezzar is recorded to have made, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built?' (Daniel iv. 30).

The contrast between the remains of Nineveh and those of Babylon has been stated as follows:—Nineveh, with its records of king succeeding king, gives us a lively sense of the power of a great empire; Babylon, with its repetition of one name, illustrates the power of one man, the king Nebuchadnezzar.

3. *History of the Relations between Nineveh and Babylon.*—Babylon, as a city, was at least as old as Nineveh, probably older, but all the remains of the more ancient Babylon have perished; what we find now are remains of Nebuchadnezzar's new or restored capital. Several centuries before the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon had been the capital of an empire wider and more powerful than that of Assyria, but it had been subdued by the Assyrians to the rank of a province. Between the time of the fall of Samaria and that of the fall of Jerusalem, the subject prince of Babylon had, however, rebelled against his lord, the great king of Assyria, and had regained his independence. From being independent, he tried to become supreme. He attacked the king to whom his predecessors had long been subject, and defeated him. With the defeat of the king of Assyria, Nineveh lost all her glory, and fell into ruin. More than 2,000 years ago the ruins were passed by the armies of a Persian prince, but were observed by him only as ruins; of what city they were the remains he seems neither to have known nor cared. It is only within a comparatively very

short time that any definite knowledge has been gained about them.

Soon after the death of the king Nebuchadnezzar, to whom Babylon owed her grandeur, Babylon herself was besieged and taken. The fact we have noticed already; now let us hear how it happened. The walls of Babylon were exceedingly strong, so strong that the people felt sure that no enemy could break them down, and therefore, when the army of the Medes and Persians came, they did not distress themselves, but continued their enjoyments, just as if there had been no enemy outside their walls. But there was one weak point in their defence. The River Euphrates ran through the middle of the city, crossed by a bridge, which enabled the inhabitants of the two parts of the city to communicate freely with each other. Towards the river, Babylon had no fortifications. This the commander of the Persians knew, and resolved to avail himself of his knowledge. He withdrew his army from the immediate neighbourhood of Babylon, and employed them in making an immense canal, in the form of a semicircle, having communication with the Euphrates above and below the city. As soon as the work was finished he turned the water into the new channel, and marched his army along what had been the bed of the Euphrates, but was now left dry. Thus he got into the middle of the city, and took it. The kingdom founded by Darius and Cyrus at Babylon lasted some time, but at length it too decayed, and the city fell into ruins. Now, all that can be seen by the traveller of what was once the greatest city, and almost the wonder, of the world, is long lines of mounds of clay and earth, rising out of a marsh, which seems to be the very type of desolation.

LESSON 125.

Read Daniel i.

THE Book of Daniel, apart from its great importance arising from the prophecies which it contains, is very interesting to us, for it enables us to some extent to continue the history of the Jews, and shows us the kind of treatment which some of them received from their conquerors.

The book may be divided into two distinct parts, of which the latter is taken up with an account of some prophetic visions which Daniel saw. In these lessons we have not time to enter into the interpretation and application of the prophecies; but the historical part contains lessons which are at once briefly stated, and most important. The lesson which we may learn from the chapter we have now read is a lesson of temperance and self-restraint. Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known by

their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were captives in Babylon. They were, however, by no means harshly treated, for they were among the number of those who were chosen by the chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar's household, to be instructed in all the wisdom for which the Chaldeans or Babylonians of that time were very famous. The intention of the king was to educate these young men for three years, and then to summon them to his presence, and give them the work for which he might find them fit. During the time of their training he purposed to support them at his own expense, and to give them food from his own table. Daniel had very probably seen in his own land the evils of indulgence in luxurious eating and drinking, and might therefore reasonably object to indulge himself in these delicacies. But there was also another reason why he should refuse to partake of the wine and the meat sent by the king. Before the food was set on the king's table, it was customary to present it before the altars of the false gods, and it seemed to Daniel that partaking of such food would be very much like sharing in the idolatries of the Babylonians. Fortunately for himself, Daniel had gained the love of the officer appointed to take charge of the captive students, and by his means leave was granted to the four youths to live on plain fare, on pulse and water, instead of the luxuries sent for them by Nebuchadnezzar. The result was that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not only fairer and fatter in flesh than the other captives, but also were able to make greater progress in their studies. These two points, bodily beauty and mental cultivation, were of the greatest importance to the youths; for, in the same degree as they possessed these qualifications would they be advanced in the court of the king. One lesson, then, is very plain from this story: if we want to be healthy and wise we must content ourselves with plain and moderate food. One of the greatest evils of England at the present time is intemperance, which destroys multitudes every year, and makes many, whom it does not kill, perfectly unfit for any honest and useful work. No doubt there are very great temptations to luxury and excess in eating and drinking; but we should always bear in mind that all such excesses ruin our health, weaken our understanding, and lessen our power of doing good to ourselves or our neighbours. But there is another and a far higher reason why we should be temperate and sober. Intemperance destroys, only too often, a man's desire and even his power to serve God; and therefore both gluttony and drunkenness are spoken of in the Bible as sins. To indulge any of our appetites to excess, is as much a sin as it would have been in Daniel to have eaten of the food which he knew was consecrated to idols. We must remember that we have a higher life than that of our bodies, even the life of our souls, and that that higher life, as

well as the life of our bodies, is weakened or destroyed by the indulgence of our appetites. Let us close this lesson with the words of Moses, quoted by our Saviour when He was tempted to work a miracle for the satisfaction of His bodily hunger—'Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live' (Deuteronomy viii. 3; St. Luke iv. 4).

LESSON 126.

Read Daniel iii.

WHAT is the meaning of the word 'hero'? We use it very often when we talk about battles, and do not then use it altogether wrongly. But there are other forms of heroism, even nobler than that of courage in war. The word itself was used by the old Greeks as the name of any man whom they believed to be of the kindred of the gods, and who did godlike deeds. To save his fellow-men from destruction was as sure a mark of a hero as to destroy his enemies; and they did not refuse the name of hero to a man who spent his life in improving the condition of his fellow-men. Ship-building, commerce, agriculture were all said to have been begun by heroes. But of all the kinds of heroism about which we can read, the noblest and most godlike is that which leads men to do what they know to be their duty, without any regard to the consequences. To this noblest class of heroes the three young men of whom we have read to-day belonged. They knew their duty to God, and did it, although it seemed impossible that they should not be put to death for the doing of it.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was a great conqueror; under his rule, the Babylonian empire embraced the greater part of the east of Asia, and extended to the borders of Africa. Within his dominions he was supreme; all men obeyed him as their king. But, in his pride, he desired to be more than king. At least, it is generally believed that the golden image which he set up, and commanded all his subjects to worship, was an image of himself, and that he wished to be acknowledged, as some rulers who lived long after his time have been acknowledged, as a God. The three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were officers of high rank, and could not absent themselves from the assembly of those who were summoned by the king to be present at the dedication of the image. It was a muster of all the rulers of the empire, and at such a gathering their duty to the king compelled them to be present. But when the order was given that, at a certain signal, all those who were present should fall down and worship the golden image, another and greater duty came to be fulfilled. No earthly monarch could compel their consciences, or make them do, to please him, an

act which would be displeasing to God. When all the rest fell down and worshipped, these three alone remained standing. Such conduct could not fail to be observed, and very probably there was some jealousy against them, on account of the favour with which they, although Jews and captives, were treated by the king. The king, indeed, seems to have had a high opinion of the men, and to have known that they had served him faithfully in the posts to which he had appointed them; for, instead of inflicting upon them immediately the punishment which he had threatened against all who should refuse to worship his golden image, he gave them another opportunity of obeying his commands. If they refused a second time, he told them, they should certainly die by burning, and from the furnace into which they would be cast no God would be able to deliver them. The king spoke in rage and fury, but the three Jews answered him in words which are as calm as they are brave. They knew that God *could* deliver them, and believed that He *would* do so; at any rate, if they died, the king would have no power over them. But if not—if God did not deliver them from the furnace—still they would not deny God.

They were cast into the furnace of fire, and came out of it alive and unhurt. There is still a trace of the same pride of Nebuchadnezzar's heart in the decree which he published immediately after the deliverance of these Jews. He is not contented with confessing that he had been wrong; indeed, he scarcely does that at all, but he threatens to inflict severe punishment upon any persons who would not agree with his opinion on the matter. It is true he did not, in that decree, command anybody to do anything wrong, but still it was just as much a claim to possess power over men's consciences as the former command had been. Now, let us consider two very important points:—

1. The men said, 'But if not . . . we will not . . . worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' We are very often told that we ought to do right, because doing right will be to our advantage, either in this life or in the future life. It is very true that we ought to do right, but the reason which is often given is, as these Jews would have told us, entirely false. We must do right—that is, we must obey God's commandments—even if we are quite sure it will be to our immediate disadvantage; and we must do so, and can do so, because right is right, because it is God's will that we should do it, and because He has made us in His image that we may know what is right.

2. We must not, however, suppose that duty and devotion to duty are ever unrewarded. A man who has to suffer and to lose his life in doing what he believes to be God's will, knows that, although all men may leave him, God is with him; in that knowledge,

and in the presence of God, no pain or sorrow can be quite evil. This is what we ought to learn from those words: 'The form of the fourth is like the Son of God.' It was a miracle, indeed, that men should see the Divine Presence there, but it was not strange that He was there, for He always is with those who trust Him entirely.

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LESSON 127.

Read Daniel iv.

THIS chapter is an account of a wonderful fall and restoration, written by the man who was the subject of them. The last lesson showed us that pride was the distinguishing characteristic of the great king Nebuchadnezzar. His writing this full account of his punishment for his pride is a sure proof that the punishment was not in vain, but that his heart was really humbled by the discipline he had to undergo.

A dream, which Nebuchadnezzar had, caused him great anxiety; he sent for all the wise men of Babylon, who were celebrated for their skill in the interpretation of dreams, and asked them for an explanation. But none of them could give him the interpretation of the dream. At last he consulted Daniel; telling him what he had seen in his dream. A great tree stood in the midst of the earth; its branches spread wide, and its fruit was very plentiful. But at length 'a watcher and an holy one' seemed to come down from heaven, and to give commandment to cut down the great tree, but to leave its stump in the earth, and bind it with a band of iron and brass. Then followed mysterious words, which seemed to imply that the tree was a symbol of some man; for they contained terms which could apply only to human nature, such as—'Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him.'

When Daniel had heard the dream, and understood what it meant, he was greatly troubled; for one hour he did not speak. The king thought that he was afraid to tell all he knew, and asked him to speak out frankly. The reply of Daniel—'My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies'—shows that he was grateful to Nebuchadnezzar for the benefits which he had received, and that he would have been very glad if he could have done anything to avert the evil which he foresaw. He told the king that the tree was a symbol of himself. He had been raised up and made powerful by God, but had not given God the glory; he had fancied that all his might was his own, and had used it selfishly. Daniel told him that he would suffer seven 'times' or seasons, whether months or years is uncertain, of banishment from men, and would have to dwell with

the beasts of the field; but that he would be restored to his kingdom after he had learnt that 'the heavens do rule.' This dream and its interpretation give another proof of the great truth, recently set before us, that not the children of Israel alone, but all the nations of the earth were under the rule of Divine Providence. To his interpretation, which was all that he was asked to give, Daniel added good advice, by acting upon which Nebuchadnezzar might have been saved much suffering: 'Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.' The wise advice was not taken. A year after Daniel had spoken to him, Nebuchadnezzar was walking in his palace, looking over the city, and said: 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' The answer came to him, he tells us, in a voice from heaven: 'Thy kingdom is departed from thee.' In the same hour Nebuchadnezzar lost his reason, and became a prey to one of the most distressing forms of madness. He who had tried to raise himself above men, and become a god, fancied in his madness that he was a beast: 'he did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dews of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.' At the end of the seven 'times' he lifted up his eyes again to heaven; the animal spirit departed from him, and the human spirit and understanding returned. Then he knew by whose appointment he had ruled over Babylon, and 'blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.'

With Nebuchadnezzar's restoration to reason a new time of worldly prosperity commenced; he was established in his kingdom, and 'excellent majesty was added' unto him.

Nebuchadnezzar's account of his madness is well placed in the book of Daniel, immediately after the account of his pride and vain-glory; and it ought to be specially noticed, because it is, perhaps, the only specimen preserved in the Bible of the moral teaching of a heathen. Nebuchadnezzar seems not to have known very much about the God who afflicted him and then restored him to health; but he knew that He was Most High, that His 'works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.'

LESSON 128.

Read Daniel vi.

BETWEEN the madness and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, of which we read in the last lesson, and the events in Daniel's life of which we have read to-day, some time elapsed. Nebuchadnezzar died

and was succeeded by his son ; and he, again, was succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar. The end of Belshazzar's reign was very strange. Babylon was besieged by the Medes and Persians, people who came from the further east ; but Belshazzar trusted to the strength of the walls of the city, and thought that it could never be taken. One night he was feasting in his palace, when suddenly the form of a man's hand appeared, writing some words upon the palace-wall, over against the place where Belshazzar sat. None of the wise men could interpret the words ; but at last Daniel was sent for, and told the king that they were a warning of his death, and of the end of his empire. In that same night the Medes and Persians entered the city, and slew Belshazzar. With his death, the Babylonian empire ended ; and a new kingdom, generally called the Medo-Persian, was set up. The first of the new kings was the Darius of whom we read in this chapter. At the time of which we are now reading, Daniel was quite an old man. He was born before the captivity of Judah began, and Judah had now been in captivity nearly 70 years. But he continued, as we find, to have the same trust in God, which had distinguished him when he was young. He had lived nearly seventy years among worshippers of false gods, and oppressors of his countrymen ; but still he trusted in the God of his fathers, and showed his love for his native land, and his hope that after their punishment his countrymen would be allowed to return to Jerusalem. He showed this love and hope in what we may consider a strange way, but a way which probably seemed to him quite natural. When he prayed to God, as he did constantly, he prayed with his face toward Jerusalem. In this we may trace the idea expressed in the words used by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple : in his prayer he asked that the people of Israel might be heard if they should pray toward the house of the Lord.

Another passage which illustrates this chapter is the 137th Psalm, which was written by one of the Jewish captives in Babylon ; and, of that Psalm, more particularly the 5th and 6th verses : ' If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth : if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.'

These are interesting facts ; but the most important of all is that Daniel was a man of prayer. It was this habit of Daniel's life that made him the brave and true man he was. He remembered God in all his ways, and prayed that God would direct his steps. It was this trust and confidence in God, which comes from faithful, earnest prayer, that kept Daniel from fear. He alone seems to have been calm ; his enemies were too eager for his destruction, and the king too fearful of his fate, to be able to be quiet and steadfast.

Now let us consider the moral of the whole story. It is not

intended to teach us that, if we are good, we shall always be delivered from bodily danger. The best man who ever lived on earth, Jesus Himself, was put to death for His goodness. But it does teach us the way in which we may become good and brave ; namely, by seeking for God's guidance and direction at all times. If we pray from our hearts for God's help we shall be able to bear a great many sorrows which otherwise would crush us, and even if we have to face death we shall not be afraid ; we shall know that even death cannot really do us any harm, because God will be with us.

LESSON 129.

The History of Esther.

Nor very long after the great danger and the great deliverance of Daniel, the hopes of the Jews were fulfilled. The king who succeeded Darius allowed the captives to return to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the Temple. This would be naturally the next thing for us to consider. But for once we will leave the order of time, and take a glance at a history which in place is more nearly connected with the Captivity than with the time after the Return of the Jews to Palestine.

At the end of the Historical Books, in our Bibles, we find a book called Esther. That book gives us the story of a Jewish maiden, who was born in the Captivity, and shows us what noble characters were occasionally formed in that sorrowful time. The events of the story, however, it must be borne in mind, did not happen during the Captivity, but several years after.

When many of the Jews had availed themselves of the permission of the Persian kings and had gone back to Jerusalem, some of them remained in their new homes near Babylon, and, as a rule, were very kindly and fairly treated by the Persians. The Persian king, Ahasuerus—better known by the name Xerxes, which is given to him in Grecian history—lived at Shushan, or Susa, a city not very far from Babylon. Being offended with his wife, he divorced her, and gave orders to the officers of his court that another should be sought for him. They collected from various parts of his dominions, which extended from India to Egypt, all the most beautiful maidens they could find, and asked him to choose out of all the number the one who pleased him best, to be his queen. His choice fell upon a Jewish orphan girl, named Hadassah, or Esther. (The name 'Hadassah' means 'myrtle,' and was most probably given to her because of her great beauty.) Up to the time of her marriage, Esther had lived with her uncle Mordecai, a man of some influence among the Jews. Esther's advancement gave Mordecai the opportunity of access to the court,

where on one occasion he rendered a great service to the king. Two of the officers of the palace made a plot against the king's life, but Mordecai discovered it; and told it to Esther. The matter was investigated, and the officers, whose guilt was made clear, were hanged. A record was kept of Mordecai's part in the preservation of the king's life, which record turned out to be important to many other persons besides Mordecai himself. About that time the king's chief minister was Haman, a member of a family which had always hated the Jews. Haman tried to use the powers of his high office for the destruction of all the race of the Jews. He told the king that they were unruly and seditious, and obtained from the king an order for their simultaneous destruction throughout all the kingdom. As soon as this was known, Mordecai sent a message to Esther, whose Jewish descent was unknown to the king, telling her of the danger which was hanging over the whole of her countrymen, and over herself. At the same time he begged her to make intercession with the king, that the decree might be reversed. Although the court rules were very strict against the queen coming near to the king unless she was sent for, Esther went boldly to Ahasuerus, and asked him and his chief minister, Haman, to dine in her apartments. The honour thus conferred upon Haman was very great, but he was dissatisfied, because, as he went to the palace, he saw Mordecai the Jew standing at the palace-gate. His wife told him not to be grieved, but to make a tall gallows, and get permission from the king to hang his enemy at once, instead of waiting for the date fixed in the decree. He made all his preparations, and went again the next morning to the palace, where he was met by Ahasuerus with the question 'What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?' Haman, remembering the honour conferred on himself on the previous day, thought that he must be the man, and named some honours scarcely less than royal. But he did not know that the king had been examining the records, and had found out that no reward had been given to Mordecai for the discovery of the plot against the king's life. It is impossible, therefore, to describe Haman's surprise and vexation when he was commanded to treat Mordecai in the honourable way he had described. The man whom he had intended to hang was to be shown to all the city as 'the man whom the king delighted to honour.' This was a bitter defeat for the proud Haman, but worse than that came before the day was over. He had to banquet again with Esther and Ahasuerus, and then, on the second day, Esther made her petition to the king: 'Save my life, and the life of my people.' The king did not know what she meant, until she told him that she was a Jewess, and that the decree which Haman had obtained from him by false

pretences was really a decree for her death. The king's anger was roused, and he gave orders that Haman should be taken away instantly, and hanged on the very gallows which he had caused to be erected for the execution of Mordecai. Then measures were taken for the countermanding of the orders given already for the massacre of the Jews. The course adopted was one which is strange to us, but which seemed quite proper to the Persians of that time. Letters were sent by special posts, giving to the Jews, who were scattered throughout the Persian dominions, full permission to defend themselves by force of arms against any who might assault them. This was done, and Mordecai from that day took Haman's place as chief minister of King Ahasuerus.

Ever since the time when these events happened, the Jews, in all their troubles and dispersion, have kept the memory of the day by a feast of great gladness, in the course of which they speak words of blessing upon the names of Esther and Mordecai.

The moral of this long story is very plain:

1. Esther's heroic conduct shows the influence of good training, and the use which may be made of a great advance in the position of one person for the benefit of all those in whom that person takes interest. If we put the lesson into the form of a precept, we may say, 'Never let any honour make you forget those who were your friends when you were in humbler estate.'

2. The fate of Haman, even to his being hanged on the gallows he had caused to be made for Mordecai, is an illustration of the truth expressed in two verses of Psalm vii.: 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.' (Psalm vii. 15, 16.)

LESSON 130.

The Restoration of Judah (i.).

THE captivity of the Jews in Babylon lasted in round numbers seventy years, and came to an end when the decree of Cyrus was published, giving them permission to go back to their native land, and to rebuild the Temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's general Nebuzaradan. The history of the return and of the revival of Jewish nationality is given us in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, who were the leaders of the Jews during that critical period. What they did, and what difficulties they had to overcome, we will consider afterwards. In this lesson, let us consider what the Jews learnt in their captivity, and how far the return was a return of the whole nation.

The cause, that is to say, the real moral cause, of the destruction

of the Jewish kingdom by the power of the king of Babylon, was the gross sin, and especially the idolatry, of which the Jews, kings and people alike, had been guilty. Nebuchadnezzar, ignorant as he then was of the True God, was used by Him as an instrument for the punishment and purification of the people who had known the True God, but had willingly and wilfully forsaken Him.

The captivity in Babylon taught the Jews a great lesson which they never afterwards forgot, namely, the evil and the uselessness of idol worship. Before the time of the Captivity they were always falling into idolatry, notwithstanding all the arguments used and the threatenings uttered by the prophets against it. From the time of their return to Jerusalem they did not again show any tendency to that sin, and, indeed, became most eager denouncers of it. Students of this period of Jewish history think that they have discovered two reasons for this change: (1) The Babylonian empire was formed of people of very different nations, but like each other in this, that they were all idolaters. Each nation had regarded its own deity as supreme, but none of the deities had been able to deliver themselves, much less their worshippers, from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. The images of the gods of the conquered nations were taken by the conqueror to Babylon, and made what he considered the best part of his spoils. The matter had thus been put to the test of practice, and idolatry had been proved to be vain. Besides which, the Jews could not help remembering that so long as they themselves had fully trusted and worshipped the Great Unseen God, they had prospered, and that all their reverses and troubles had come upon them when they had sought after other gods and worshipped them. (2) The Persians and Medes, who subdued the Babylonians, and gave deliverance to the Jews, were not idolaters. They were, of all the nations of the olden time, the most devout believers in the unity of God. And those Persians were the most powerful and the best men that the Jews had been brought into contact with. Putting these two things together, the utter failure of idolatry as a power to keep nations alive, and the splendid success of the Persians, who were, as we have seen, worshippers of one God (generally called 'Monotheists'), we need not be surprised at the effect being produced which we know was produced upon the minds of the Jews. From the Persians, there is reason to believe, the Jews derived some other very important lessons. Some scholars think that from them the doctrine of immortality was first *clearly* learnt; but, whether that be true or not, it is plain that the Jews, who were, as a people, too much given to deceit and cunning, must have derived great benefit from intercourse with a people whose system of education is described by an ancient author in these words:

'The young Persians are taught to ride fearlessly, to shoot with the bow, and to speak the truth.'

It appears indeed, that it was the feeling of sympathy which Cyrus had with a people whose religion, like his own, was purely monotheistic, and which insisted most strongly upon truthfulness in word and deed, that induced him to issue a decree permitting the Jews to return to their native land.

Nobody, however, was forced to return to Judah; and, as a matter of fact, a very large proportion of the people remained in the various places in Mesopotamia, to which they had been assigned. Still, those who remained behind in Babylon, etc., felt themselves to be really one with those who returned to Jerusalem. Professor Westcott, in the 'Dictionary of the Bible,' puts this very forcibly, and very beautifully. He says: 'The bond by which the people of God was held together was at length felt to be religious and not local, nor even primarily national. The Jews were incorporated in different nations, and still looked to Jerusalem as the centre of their faith. The boundaries of Canaan were passed; and the beginnings of a spiritual dispensation were already made when the "Dispersion" was established among the kingdoms of the earth.'¹

LESSON 131.

The Restoration of Judah (ii.)—Ezra.

WE have accounts of the restoration of Judah in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The two books are, to a certain extent, independent of each other, although part of the history is told in both. The best plan we can follow will be to make this lesson a brief abstract of what Ezra tells; and the next, of those things which Nehemiah records more fully.

The first matter of great interest is the proclamation of Cyrus, of which the exact words are preserved in the book of Ezra: 'Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is the God), which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill-offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.' (Ezra i. 2-4.)

Besides thus giving all the weight of his authority, Cyrus gave

¹ Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' vol. i. p. 380. See also a passage, too long for quotation, in

Professor Westcott's 'Introduction to the Study of the Gospels' (chapter i. section i. (pp. 49-57, 8rd edition).

to the prince of Judah (called by the Babylonians Sheshbazzar, and by the Jews themselves Zerubbabel) all the vessels of gold and silver which remained of those which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple, and carried to Babylon.

The whole number of the men who returned to Jerusalem in consequence of this decree of King Cyrus was 42,360. Their first care was to rebuild the altar, and to recommence the daily sacrifices, and then to restore the Temple, which had been laid in ruins. The description of the setting of the foundations for the new temple, as given by Ezra, is most pathetic. The people, the great mass of them, shouted with a great shout, and praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 'But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping.' (Ezra iii. 12, 13.) From what we can learn, the feeling of regret was by far the stronger of the two; and there was some danger that, after all, the work of restoration would be given up in despair. But the people and their rulers were encouraged by two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the former of whom told them that although they had not, and therefore could not use, the silver and gold which was used in building the former Temple, yet the true spiritual glory of the second, which they were then beginning, should be greater than that of the former. Moreover, in that place, he said, God would give peace to His people.

When the Samaritans, of whose origin we have read in Lesson 114, heard that the rebuilding of the Temple had been begun, they asked to be allowed to join in the work; but Zerubbabel would not grant their request, because they were not of the seed of Israel. The refusal annoyed the Samaritans so much that they forthwith endeavoured to stop the work, making false representations as to the conduct and designs of the Jews to Darius, who had succeeded Cyrus as king of Persia. Darius caused search to be made among the records of the kingdom, and found a copy of the decree of Cyrus. When he had read it, instead of stopping the work of restoration, he sent letters to the governors of the provinces west of the Euphrates, commanding them to assist the Jews, and to see that it was done with speed. So the actual building was completed. Then, as we learn, Ezra himself went up from Babylon to Jerusalem. He is sometimes called Ezra the priest, because his descent was clearly traced from Aaron, the first High Priest; and, at other times, Ezra the scribe, from his special work of copying and interpreting the Book of the Law of Moses.

During their captivity in Babylon the great bulk of the Jews had nearly, if not quite, forgotten their own Hebrew language, and had become much more familiar with the Chaldean language; and therefore it was necessary that the Law should not only be read, but also interpreted to them.

The Chaldean or Aramaic language, which the Jews learnt in Babylon, was an older language than Hebrew. Abraham, says Prof. Max Müller, undoubtedly spoke Aramaic. *Hebrew* was the language spoken in Palestine from the Israelite conquest to the Captivity. It was also the language in which the sacred books of the Israelites were written, in which they continued to be copied, even after it had ceased to be a spoken language, and in which they have been preserved to our own time. But *Aramaic* was spoken all over the west of Asia, the Greek provinces of Asia Minor excepted. It was the language of diplomacy in Asia, as French has been in modern Europe. Many of the Babylonian inscriptions have notes in Aramaic. It was also the language of the whole Jewish literature, from B.C. 400 to A.D. 900. To us, Aramaic is extremely interesting; because it was the language generally spoken by our Saviour and His Apostles.¹

Soon after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem he found, to his sorrow, that the Jews were not keeping themselves separate from the people of the land, but were making marriages with members of idolatrous tribes, and so endangering again the existence of their own nation as 'a holy seed.' On account of this offence, Ezra fasted and prayed, and afterwards solemnly charged all persons who had thus taken non-Jewish husbands or wives to separate themselves from them. Ezra's special work, as described in the book which bears his name, ended with the administration of an oath to the people, that they would, in this matter of marriage as in all others, obey faithfully the law given by God to Moses. One part of his work remains to be considered, but as the account which we have of it is given by Nehemiah, we will reserve it for the next lesson.

LESSON 132.

The Restoration of Judah (iii.).—Nehemiah.

THE first work undertaken by the exiles when they returned to their native land was the rebuilding of the Temple. But the city of Jerusalem was still almost a waste: the walls were broken down, and most of the gates impassable; so that if any enemies attacked the Jews, they would find an easy prey. News of the desolation of the city was brought by some messengers to Nehemiah, a Jew of

¹ Max Müller. 'Lectures on the Science of Language,' i. 319-322.

See also 'Speaker's Commentary,' vi. p. 228.

noble birth, who was cupbearer to the king of Persia. The sad state of the city, and the defenceless condition of his countrymen, caused Nehemiah great grief. For some months Nehemiah kept his grief to himself, praying constantly that God would send some deliverance to the people. At length the king noticed his sadness, and asked him why he was sad. Nehemiah told him the cause, and asked permission to go to Jerusalem, that he might superintend the rebuilding of the city walls. His request was granted, and more than he asked was given him. The king furnished him with orders upon his foresters for wood for the gates, and with a troop of horsemen to convey him safely to the place. Soon after his arrival in Jerusalem, he rode round the city by night to examine the state of the walls, and in the morning called together the chief men, and told them what he wished to do. The work was apportioned to different sets of workmen, who began their appointed tasks with good courage. Hindrances to the progress of the work arose from the same persons who had desired in vain to take part in the building of the Temple. But Nehemiah trusted in God, and held on his way through all difficulties. First, the adversaries of Judah threatened war: Nehemiah told all the people that they would very probably have to fight for their brethren, their sons and daughters, their wives and their houses; but encouraged them still to trust in God, and go on with building the wall. The able-bodied men in Jerusalem were divided into two parts, the first to keep guard, fully armed, while the second worked at the building. Even the builders were prepared for fighting. Those that carried burdens carried with one hand and held a weapon in the other; and as for the actual builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. While danger threatened the small community from without, there were also, in the second place, dangers from within. The richer Jews lent money to their poorer brethren, and, as security for the money lent, took their houses and lands. The distress which ensued was very great, and Nehemiah could lessen it only by adopting severe measures. He ordered that from that time no Jew should exact usury from his brother Jew. His own disinterestedness was shown by his maintaining himself during all the years of his governorship, although he was empowered by the king to tax the people for his maintenance.

After the failure of open threats, the adversaries of Nehemiah tried by secret conspiracy to get him into their power. He refused to leave Jerusalem, and they then accused him of wishing to rebel against Persia, and to make himself king of Judah. This accusation they threatened to lay before the king of Persia, but Nehemiah, although, as he confesses, their words made him afraid, answered them so boldly that, as it appears, this threat came to nothing.

The men of Jerusalem, under the command of Nehemiah, went on with the building of the wall until they had finished it.

The material structure both of the Temple of God and of the wall of the city being finished, the attention of Nehemiah and Ezra, with Jeshua, the high priest, was turned to the religious and civil condition of the people.

With regard to the first point we heard in the last lesson that Ezra was a scribe, that is to say, he was learned in matters of the Law, and could interpret it to the people. One occasion when he did so is described in the Book of Nehemiah. Ezra ascended a pulpit of wood, and read the words of the Law in the ears of the people, 'and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.' This is the reading which was followed by the swearing of a covenant, of which we have already spoken. We must return to it now, because it is generally believed that this reading and interpretation of the Law by Ezra was the beginning of what we should call public worship among the Jews. Before that time the only public ordinance had been the ordinance of sacrifice. Ezra added the reading and interpretation of the Law, and public prayer. This was the foundation of those institutions of which, under the name of synagogues, we shall hear a great deal in the New Testament.

On the other point, the civil order of the people, Nehemiah came to a very wise decision. Jerusalem was once more a fortified town, and the Jews had, therefore, a place to which they might retire in time of danger from external enemies. But Jerusalem was not the only town in Judah, and, if the Jews were to be well supplied with the necessities and conveniences of life, they must spread themselves again over the land. One-tenth of the people, chosen by lot, remained in the city of Jerusalem; the remaining nine-tenths were distributed throughout the towns and villages of Judah. Thus they settled down, and, under the protection of Persia, soon began to enjoy once more something like their former prosperity.

LESSON 133.

Continuation of Jewish History to the Roman Conquest.

THE Book of Nehemiah is the last part of the history of the Jews given in the Bible. But in the Bible more than 400 years are passed over in silence, between the end of Nehemiah's work and the beginning of the New Testament history. This lesson will contain a very brief account of the doings and sufferings of the Jews during that time—a time, it should be understood, about as long as that from David to Nehemiah.

What we have already learnt about the restoration of the Jews to their own land, has shown that there was nothing in it like a restoration of the monarchy or even of independent nationality. Judah was a province of Persia, governed by rulers appointed by the Persian kings. Under this rule, which seems to have been just and moderate, the Jews passed, about 80 or 90 years in such uneventful quiet that we know nothing whatever about them. But at the end of that time a great change took place. Hitherto, the East and West had been very much separated, or if they came into collision the East had nearly always prevailed. Now, however, the power of the West, that is to say, of Greece, began to spread very widely. A young Grecian king, known in all histories as Alexander the Great, led Grecian armies against all the Eastern kingdoms, and entirely defeated them. All Asia west of the Indus was subdued by this great soldier. The Jews did not wait to be attacked, but sent an embassy to him, submitting to his sway. It is said that the terms which he made with them were very favourable; he guaranteed to them liberty of worship, and the right of collecting taxes for the maintenance of their Temple.

Alexander died when he was still young, and his generals disputed among themselves for the succession to his empire. The result was a separation into distinct kingdoms, of which two, those of Egypt and Syria, are important to us now. The king of Egypt, intending to seize the whole of Syria, attacked Jerusalem. His assault was made on the Sabbath, and, being unresisted, was entirely successful. He took 100,000 Jews as prisoners, and settled them in Egypt, in the city of Alexandria. After some years the king of Syria regained the Jewish part of his dominions, and from that time the Jews frequently changed masters. About 175 years before Christ's birth, a king of Syria, named Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanes, or the Illustrious, deliberately attempted to destroy the religion of the Jews, and to substitute Greek heathenism in its place. In the attempt he exposed the Jews to almost inconceivable cruelties, but he could not bend their will. This cruel persecution, says Dean Milman, was, in fact, 'the safeguard of the Jewish nation from the greatest danger to which it had ever been exposed—the slow and secret encroachment of Grecian manners, Grecian arts, Grecian vices, and Grecian idolatry. . . . It again identified the true patriot with the devout worshipper.'

Against the tyranny of Antiochus the Jews rose in arms under the leadership of the sons of a priest named Mattathias. These leaders, the bravest and most skilful warriors that the nation had ever produced, were named 'Maccabees,' either from the first letters of a sentence written on their banners, *Mi Camoca Baalim Jehovah*—'Who among the gods is like unto Thee, O Jehovah?'

or from a word meaning 'a hammer,' which might describe the power of their attacks. They were successful in their resistance, and became the founders of a line of rulers, half princes, half priests, under whom Judæa remained for many generations. But at length the power of Rome, which had been growing during all the time spoken of in this lesson, was extended over Syria and Judæa. Fifty-seven years before the birth of our Saviour, Jerusalem was taken, and the Temple defiled, by the Roman general, Pompey, called the Great. The Romans did not take their conquest into their own hands at once, but, after 15 years of great trouble and confusion, Herod, an Idumæan adventurer, was by the powerful help of the Romans seated on the throne; so that once more Judah was a kingdom, but under a foreign prince. This was the Herod who died within a year or two after the birth of our Saviour.

We must now go back a little, to the connection of the Jews with Alexander and his successors. The great king built a city in Egypt and called it after his own name, Alexandria. Here he settled a large colony of Jews, which was increased by the addition, under the Egyptian king, Ptolemy, of the 100,000 captives of whom we heard just now. The Jews in Alexandria were well treated, and multiplied greatly. Alexandria became a second centre of the nation, with this difference, that the Jews in Jerusalem and Judæa continued to use their own language, the Aramaic or Syrian; the Jews in Alexandria, on the other hand, spoke the Greek language, and studied Greek philosophy. Some results of this fact we shall notice hereafter; now we need consider only one. The Alexandrian Jews, being, all but a few scholars, ignorant of Hebrew, had a translation of the Old Testament made into Greek. This translation, which is generally called the Septuagint, from a story that it was the work of seventy translators, is that which is more frequently quoted than any other in the New Testament; and is very important to all students of the Bible, because it shows us what books were read, and called books of Scripture, about 150 years before Christ.

LESSON 134.

Hebrew Poetry (general).

ALL our lessons hitherto have been on passages from the historical books of the Bible. But the Bible contains other books besides the historical books, and of these others some account shall be given in the few lessons which follow.

There are Poetical Books, such as the Book of Job and of the Psalms; Prophetical Books, such as the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah; and Books of Wisdom, such as the Proverbs and

Ecclesiastes. The two divisions, Poetical and Prophetical, are not *exactly* described by their titles; the name given in each case is that which seems, on the whole, most suitable. But the Prophetical Books, those of Isaiah and Habakkuk for example, are full of poetry; and, on the other hand, many of the Psalms are distinctly prophetical.

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Besides the poems which are collected together in the poetical books, there are a few scattered poems in those books of which we have already read large parts; for example, there is the death-song of Jacob in the Book of Genesis, the song of Miriam in the Book of Exodus, and a song of Moses, called the Song of the Rock, in the Book of Deuteronomy. In this lesson we will consider briefly Hebrew poetry in general, and illustrate the subject by quotations from these detached poems.

In English poetry we always have a certain number of syllables, or, at any rate, a certain number of accents, or places where the voice would be raised if we were reading aloud, in each line, and sometimes the last words or last syllables of the lines are so chosen that the same kind of sound is repeated at certain intervals. These peculiarities we call metre and rhyme, but we should not call everything written in pursuance of the rules of metre and rhyme by the name of poetry. We only give the name poetry to noble or beautiful thoughts expressed according to those rules. The essential part of poetry, then, is the nobility or beauty of the thoughts.

If we bear this in mind we shall not be inclined to say that the Hebrew poetry is not poetry, simply because we are told that it has no rhyme, and, very rarely, regular metre. The thoughts in many of the Hebrew poems are the noblest and the most beautiful that ever have been expressed in words. Even as we can read them, not in the language in which they were written, but in our English translation, we cannot help feeling that they are poetry of the very highest order. Take as examples:—

(1) The description of the separation of the waters of the Red Sea, from the Song of Miriam: ‘And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.’

(2) The description of God’s tender care and love, shown in leading the Children of Israel through the desert, from Moses ‘Song of the Rock’: ‘As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields, and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.’

Now, although metre is seldom, and rhyme never, found in the Bible poetry, we must not suppose that there is nothing which answers the same purpose as these devices; that is to say, which fixes the attention and makes the sound impressive. There are many such devices, of which only one is simple enough to be traced readily in other passages than those which we shall read in this lesson as examples. This device, which is called 'parallelism,' consists in so arranging the words and thoughts that the verse divides into nearly equal parts, in which the same idea may be repeated under different forms, or corresponding ideas may have their various parts set in very similar forms. The meaning of parallelism will be best explained by writing the first and second verses of the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy (the Song of the Rock) in parallel order:—

(1) {	(a) Give ear,	(a) and hear,
	(b) O ye heavens,	(b) O earth,
	(c) and I will speak;	(c) the word of my mouth.
(2) {	(a) My doctrine	(a) and my speech
	(b) shall drop	(b) shall distil
	(c) as the rain,	(c) as the dew;

Then the idea of rain is carried on, in two similar forms:—

as the small rain	upon the tender herb,
and as the showers	upon the grass.

By the use of devices akin to this, the impressiveness of the words is greatly increased; the repetition of one idea upon the ear is like that of a voice which must be listened to.

And indeed, the greater number of the single poems in the Bible have this characteristic: one main idea is presented again and again in all the different forms that the poet's fancy can suggest, and from all sides, so that at last its meaning must be grasped to some extent, and some of the words, especially those most frequently repeated, must dwell in the mind of the hearer or reader. For example, the main idea of the Song of the Rock is the unchangeableness of God. This idea is put forward in all ways: by direct assertion, by comparison with the fickleness of man and the vanity of idols, and by illustrations from His dealings with men; until we cannot avoid the feeling that it is true.

LESSON 135.

Read Job xxviii.

THE Book of Job, one chapter of which we have just read, is confessed by scholars to be one of the most difficult of the whole Bible. It would be altogether out of place to state these difficulties here, because they could only be stated, and could not be explained.

There are, however, some broad general statements which may be made, and which are admitted by all scholars to be true. The book is a poem, in which the troubles and sorrows of a righteous man are made to furnish occasion for the discussion of the deepest mysteries of human life. The difficulties which are discussed by Job and his friends are exactly the same as those which trouble men now, and, to all appearance, will never be quite cleared up in this life. But the direction of the true solution of them all is pointed out to us. These difficulties are a part of our probation, that is, of the discipline which God uses for us, and in us, to bring out the true faculties of our nature, and to lead us to the confession that by ourselves we are very weak and ignorant, but that He is all goodness, and power, and wisdom. The more strengthening lesson, that God is love, was reserved for a later time in the world's life.

The chapter which we have now read is an expansion of one idea, and forms, we may say, a poem quite complete by itself. The one idea is that our human faculties are of themselves insufficient to lead us to true and perfect wisdom.

First, then, the first eleven verses tell us how much man can discover, and to what uses he can put his knowledge. From this subject the poem passes (verse 15) to the praise of wisdom, the two subjects being connected by the question (verse 12), which is almost one of despair, 'But where shall wisdom be found?' With this praise of wisdom there are blended words which describe its inaccessibility, the fact that it is a secret or hidden thing.

In the third place, (verse 23-27) the secret of wisdom is disclosed; wisdom is declared to belong to God, some outward signs of Whose wisdom are related.

Lastly, the poem concludes (verse 28) with a definition, or a revelation of practical wisdom, of wisdom which man can attain unto, and which he must seek after as for life itself. 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'

Now, keeping this general account of the poem in our minds, let us seek for an explanation of a few of the details. The writer of the Book of Job thought, and many wise people think now, that the skill of man and the power of his mind are displayed most clearly in the way in which he searches for precious metals, and, having found them, uses them for various purposes. That man should know something about the things which are around him on the surface of the earth does not appear at all wonderful, but it does appear wonderful that he should arrive at a knowledge of the treasures hidden beneath the earth; that he should be able to discover where, far out of sight, the gold and silver, the iron and copper are concealed, and to make deep mines to get at their ores.

And having got the ore, that man should use fire to separate the metal itself from the dross, is, perhaps, a still more wonderful proof of his intelligence. Men are not satisfied with merely obtaining bread by cultivating the surface of the earth, they turn it up under as with fire.¹ We are accustomed now to the use of metals, and to hear of deep mines, but long ago, before use had deadened wonder, such things must have appeared strange. There is wonder in them still, if only we think rightly about them. Birds can fly from place to place, but they do not know the way which men make under the earth; even the vulture's sight, more keen and piercing than that of other birds, cannot pierce to the places of the silver and the gold. But man overturns the solid mountains, and makes under the earth artificial rivers for the draining of the mines he digs; if he meets with subterranean streams, he diverts their course; the result of such work being that 'his eye seeth every precious thing,' and that 'the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.'

And yet all this does not give wisdom or understanding. The meaning of this is, that man can find out, and is meant to find out, *how* natural things are, but cannot find out *why* they are. Our natural knowledge is knowledge of facts; the wisdom which we seek is knowledge of principles. Compared with wisdom, all that the miner can dig out of the earth, and all the coral and pearls that the diver brings up from the depth of the sea, are of small value.

But God understandeth the way of wisdom and knoweth the place thereof. His wisdom is shown in the way in which He has arranged all the powers which act upon the earth; the force of the winds and the weight of the waters have been directed by His might. Those apparently capricious powers the rain and the lightning are under His control.

The lesson which man ought to learn from the display of God's wisdom as compared with his own knowledge, which, though very great, is still limited, is that with which this poem closes: Fear God, serve Him, and obey His commandments, for that is wisdom; depart from evil, for that is understanding.

LESSON 136.

The Psalms.—Read Psalm i.

THE Book of Psalms is a collection of poems which agree in one particular, though in many others they are as different as possible. They were all written to be sung or chanted with a musical accompaniment. Some of them were used in public, in the Temple

¹ The allusion in verse 5 is believed to be to the use of fire for blasting rocks in the subterraneous passages of mines.

or at some of the Feasts; others were for private use; and many seem to have been put into the form of poetry and sung, because the feelings of the authors could not find vent in any other way. Those feelings were as various as we can possibly conceive. Some of the Psalms are full of joy and gladness; others are steeped in sorrow and bitterness; they are more like groans of pain or wails of lamentation than like songs. But both the joyful and the sorrowful Psalms are utterances from the very hearts of those who first sang them. Their joy or their sorrow is unfolded without reserve. The reason of this fulness we may, perhaps, understand if we remember that the Psalms were not mainly composed for men to read and criticise; but were, as one of the Psalmists calls them, the pouring out of their composers' hearts to God. And because of this fulness of feeling, the Psalms have always been, and will always be, sources of comfort to all godly men in trouble, or means of expressing their delight when in joy. For although the circumstances of men have changed very greatly, since the latest of the Psalms was composed, men's hearts and feelings are the same now as they were when the earliest Psalm was sung.

The words 'earliest' and 'latest' have been used of the Psalms, and the Book of Psalms has been called a 'collection,' with a distinct and definite purpose. It is important for us to know that the separate Psalms are almost entirely independent of each other; that each of them is a poem by itself; that they were not written by one man or at one time, but by many men, and at times widely apart from each other. We sometimes call the book 'the Psalms of David;' but it is quite certain that David did not write the whole of them, and that the collection of them into one book was not made until long after David's death, probably not till the time of Ezra, that is to say, after the return of the Jews from their Captivity. The name of David, however, seems to have been given to the Book, because there are a far greater number of Psalms evidently written by him than by any other poet.

The earliest of the Psalms is believed to be the 90th, which has the title, 'A Prayer of Moses the man of God,' and among the latest are the 137th, which is of the time of the Babylonian Captivity, and the 126th, which is a song of praise to God for the Restoration of Judah. Each Psalm, being a separate poem, is nearly always the development of one or two leading thoughts, which, as in Hebrew poetry generally, are put in different forms but never lost sight of.

The first Psalm, which we have read this morning, is a good illustration of this fact.

The leading thought in this Psalm is the excellence of the Law of God, not considered as a collection of formal rules, but as

a revelation of God's will to the conscience of man. This thought is naturally divided into two parts—the blessedness of the godly, and the misery of the ungodly man. Each of these subjects occupies three verses of the Psalm.

The blessedness of the godly man is said to depend first upon what he refrains from doing, secondly upon what he does, and in the third place an illustration is used to describe the nature of the blessedness itself.

Let us read the three verses again, to bring them fresh to our memories: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in due season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.'

In the first verse the same kind of thought is repeated three times. The good man does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, that is, he does not actively participate in the deeds of the wicked; he does not stand in the way of sinners, that is, he does not quietly allow sin; he does not sit in the seat of the scornful, that is, does not associate with them in planning their evil deeds.

The contrary of these evil ways is then set forth; the good man delights in God's Law, and meditates in it, tries to search out all its meaning.

As a consequence of this action, he is blessed of God. And the blessedness is an active thing; as a tree watered by a running stream is always green, and fruitful in the season of fruit, so God's grace preserves the good man, and makes his deeds prosper, that is, makes them full of advantage and benefit to himself and others.

Then comes the second thought, the misery of the ungodly. The words in which this thought is expressed are as follow: 'The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.' Ungodly men have no permanence; they are not like a growing tree whose roots strike deep into the ground, but like the light chaff, or husk of corn which the least wind can drive away. In that way sinners and their deeds will be driven away, if not at once, at any rate in the day when the good and bad shall be judged, or divided from each other.

And neither of these things, blessedness or misery, comes by itself; both are the result of God's laws. 'The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.'

LESSON 137.

Read Psalm xxiii.

THIS 23rd Psalm is a Psalm written by David, who was a shepherd-boy of Bethlehem long before he was made King of Israel. It seems to have been written when David was advanced in life, and had seen many troubles. The one idea of the Psalm, which makes it so suitable to mankind in all times, is, that God protects those that trust in Him. People who have had sorrows to endure are comforted by the knowledge that they are in the hands of God.

The Psalm describes God's care by two images: the first, that of a shepherd caring for his sheep; the second, that of a hospitable man entertaining one who is not only a stranger, but pursued by his enemies. After these similitudes, David expresses his gratitude to God for His past mercies, and declares his sure trust in Him for the future.

The image, or similitude, to which it is purposed to direct special attention to-day, is the first, that of the Shepherd and his sheep.

Wherever sheep are kept, the shepherd must take great care of them; but the circumstances of an Eastern shepherd are those to which the Psalm especially refers, and we shall therefore understand the Psalm better if we examine the parts of it separately, with reference to Eastern customs and the geography of Palestine. The south part of Palestine has many nearly barren hills, but between the hills, where the water collects, or where streams flow, the vegetation is very luxuriant. The sheep could not find such a place for themselves, and therefore it is the duty of a good and watchful shepherd to take them where they may find abundant food. In England a shepherd drives his sheep before him, but in the East he goes before and the sheep follow him; he leads them beside the still waters. Then, when the pasture in one place is exhausted, or the streams have run dry, the sheep have to be led to another place where food may still be found. In passing from one pasture to another the shepherd and his flock often have to go through deep dark ravines, whose darkness might remind the shepherd of the shadow of death. Besides, such ravines are generally the haunt of wild beasts, from whose attacks the sheep may be in actual danger of death. But the shepherd defends them. He has a rod, with which he guides the flock, and a staff with which he defends them from the wolf. His rod and staff keep the sheep in the right way and in the safe way.

All this David knew by experience, and he was thinking about it when he said 'The Lord is my shepherd.' Let us go over the

verses once more, and consider the moral or spiritual meaning. The shepherd does not allow his sheep to want anything that is needful for them; so God does not allow those who trust in Him to want anything that is really for their good. And such persons know that God is guiding and protecting them, whether they are in joy or sorrow. When they are in joy they know that He is strengthening them; ~~He leads them in the paths of righteousness.~~ Even when death is close at hand they fear no evil, because God is with them, guiding them to a place of peace and rest.

The remaining verses of the Psalm present God's care under a different image. He is spoken of as dealing, not with sheep, but with a man, hungry and pursued by his foes. The fifth verse, 'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over,' gives us a good indication of the time when the Psalm was written, for it describes almost exactly the treatment which David received from Barzillai, when he was fleeing before Absalom. It was a man, Barzillai, who was thus kind and good to David; but David knew that kindness and goodness are put into men's hearts by God, and so he gave thanks to God as his real preserver and entertainer.

The last verse describes David's grateful resolve. All his life long he has experienced God's goodness and mercy, and is sure that they will follow him still; therefore, he says, he will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever; that is to say, he will always try to retain a remembrance of God's great goodness, and live as in God's sight.

LESSON 138.

Read Psalm civ.¹

Our first thought in reading this Psalm may very probably have been that it contradicts a statement made in a previous lesson, namely, that each Psalm is the unfolding of one or two leading ideas. In this beautiful Psalm the author speaks about so many different things that we are at first bewildered, and almost unable to trace the thread of the thoughts. But if we study it carefully, and read it through several times, we shall find that all these different things are mentioned, because the Psalmist was full of one thought, and saw them all in their relation to that thought. The one thought is of the glory of God shown in the creation and preservation of the world. All the most useful, and the most

¹ I would strongly recommend the teacher, in the case of this Psalm, and in some other cases in which the lesson given is an abstract of the passage of Scripture read, to have the passage read, not only before

commencing the comment, but also after the comment, when his scholars have had their attention awakened by the account given of the characteristics of the passage.

beautiful, and the most powerful objects are evidences of God's power and goodness. This seems to be the reason why the Psalmist speaks of the clouds, the winds, the lightning, the deep waters of the sea, and the running waters of the streams and rivers. Then he goes on to speak of the things which are nourished by the waters, of the plants and animals whose life depends upon the supply of water which they receive from rain or from rivers. He sees also that God cares for all His creatures, giving them the instincts according to which they live, and providing food for them all. Then comes the thought that he and his fellow-men are also creatures of God, and he understands how great a blessing it is that God has so made man that he must work with Him in this beautiful world. Man is not made to enjoy himself in idleness, but to work. 'Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour until the evening.' Then the Psalmist seems to be thinking, although he does not directly say so, how good it is that rest comes, and how sweet is rest after labour! At this point he brings out in words the thought which has been in his mind all along: 'O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches.' Then he proceeds to speak of the sea, and how men sail over it in ships, and how all that men and animals need comes from God, who opens His hand and fills them with good.

All this is, perhaps, no more than many a man might think, if he looked only at the bright side of everything. It would not be hard to believe in God if all were beautiful and pleasant. But the Psalmist goes on, and speaks of death and suffering, and of such terrible things as earthquakes and volcanoes, and says that they also show God's glory. Let us listen again to his words, 'Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.' 'He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; He toucheth the hills, and they smoke.' A man must have, as this Psalmist had, a very firm faith in God, to be able to speak so. Pain, and sorrow, and death, will surely come to us all, some day; how can we face them? The only way to meet these hard experiences, the only way to be undisturbed by the great convulsions of nature, is the Psalmist's way, that is, to be quite sure that these things, as well as things which are pleasant and beautiful, are appointed by God, and that therefore they must in the end be for our good.

To show more clearly, by means of a contrast, what comfort and strength this sure trust in God can give a man in the presence of great calamities, we will read part of a letter, written under trying circumstances by a wise and good heathen, who, however, did not believe that the gods whom he worshipped had control over the course of nature. The contrast between the Psalmist's

confidence and the heathen philosopher's despair is very striking and instructive.

In the year 79 A.D. there occurred a great eruption of Vesuvius. The streams of lava which flowed down the sides of the mountain destroyed the city of Herculaneum, with many farms and vineyards, killing great numbers of men and animals. The showers of stones and ashes which were first cast up by the mountain, and afterwards fell round its base, completely covered another city, called Pompeii. The destruction was so rapid that many of the inhabitants of those cities were unable to escape, and were burned in their houses by the molten lava, or suffocated under the dense mass of ashes. All the people who lived within a great distance of Vesuvius were of course seriously alarmed, by the destruction which they witnessed, by the constant earthquakes, or shakings of the ground, which attended the eruption, and by the darkness in the day-time, caused by the showers of ashes and columns of smoke, which obscured the sun for miles round the mountain. Among those who were near at hand was a Roman admiral, named Pliny, and his nephew of the same name. The latter, generally known as 'the younger Pliny,' has left, in one of his letters, an account of the dreadful scenes he witnessed. We need only quote the parts which describe the feelings and thoughts which were excited in him, and in other persons, so far as he could discover them. He says, of the multitudes who were trying by flight to preserve their lives, 'some were loudly lamenting their own fate, others the fate of those dear to them. Some even prayed for death, in their fear of what they prayed for. Many lifted their hands in prayer to the gods; *more were convinced that there were now no gods at all*, and that the final endless night of which we have heard had come upon the world.'—'I might boast that not a sigh, not a word wanting in courage, escaped me, even in the midst of peril so great, *had I not been convinced that I was perishing in company with the universe, and the universe with me—a miserable and yet a mighty solace in death.*' Now let us read again, that we may end with a statement of the true way of looking at such calamities, the three verses of the Psalm which have suggested these thoughts: 'The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever; the Lord shall rejoice in His works. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; He toucheth the hills, and they smoke. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will praise my God while I have my being.'

The contrast drawn out in this lesson between the attitude of a godly and that of a godless man towards natural phenomena may derive additional force from the following extract of a letter from

the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius to the common assembly of Asia, in the second century after Christ. The assembly had denounced the Christians of Asia as despisers of the gods, and as the causes of violent earthquakes which had recently occurred in the province of Asia. The Emperor says, 'I should have thought that the gods themselves would see to it that such offenders should not escape. . . . Regarding the earthquakes which have already happened, and are now occurring, it is not seemly that you remind us of them, *losing heart whenever they occur*, and thus *set your conduct in contrast* with that of these men (the Christians); *for they have much greater confidence towards God than you yourselves have.*'

LESSON 139.

Read Psalm cvii.

THE last Psalm which we read was a hymn of praise to God for His goodness and power as shown in nature. This Psalm is also a hymn in praise of God's goodness, but that goodness is considered from another side, namely, with reference to the various conditions of men. We may describe the two Psalms very briefly, and yet very truly, by saying the 104th sets forth the power of God in nature, and the 107th sets forth the same power in Providence.¹ The leading thought of the Psalm we have now read is that which is expressed in the 8th, 15th, 21st, and 31st verses: 'Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men.' This sentence is repeated after each part of the Psalm, and forms what is called its burden; if it were any ordinary poem we should call it the chorus. Probably, when the Psalm was sung, the different parts were taken by different voices, which all joined together in singing this burden.

This leading thought, God's goodness and power in Providence, is illustrated by the different parts of the Psalm in detail.

It has been believed by some persons who have studied the Psalms carefully that the deliverances recorded in this Psalm are certain deliverances of the people of Israel, but others prefer to take all the expressions as perfectly general. The latter view is probably the true one. Many verses may be illustrated by facts in the history of Israel, but they apply to others as well.

First, we have praise to God for His mercy and goodness

¹ The word Providence may need explanation; I would suggest that the explanation should begin with the etymology of the word—'providentia,' from 'pro' 'before,' and

'videre' 'to see'—and that then the scholars should be told that as God sees beforehand all events, He, being perfectly good, so orders those events that they turn to good results.

shown in guiding travellers through a desert land, where no food or water could be found. The absence of water is said by travellers in the countries east and south of Palestine to be the great difficulty with which they have to contend. A few drops of water, although it may be so muddy that we should turn from it with disgust, would there be thought a most precious treasure. And in the absence of any well-marked roads, the direction in which men ought to travel over the sands is often very uncertain. The Psalmist praises God for leading forth such travellers by the right way to a city of habitation, that is, to a settled place where they can find supplies of those things they need.

Under this figure of a journey in a desert land, which we have examined thus with reference to its first meaning, it is very probable that the Psalmist intended to describe not only the perils of such an actual journey, but also the dangers and troubles of human life. We often speak of the 'journey of life,' and we shall do well to remember that it is God's providence which conveys us safely through all life's dangers. [The same application may be made of the description near the end of the Psalm of the dangers of the sea. In the voyage over the seas of life we should have trust in God, who delivers us out of our distresses.]

Next we are told that God's providence is shown also in the manner in which He punishes those who rebel against His word. He makes them feel how good it is to obey Him by letting them experience the labour or misery that follows disobedience. In that misery men call upon God, and He hears their cry and delivers them.

The next part of the Psalm is almost a repetition of this. But when we read it carefully we find that the reference in verses 10-16 is to the punishment and deliverance of nations, but in verses 17-22 it is to the punishment and deliverance of individuals. Sickness and health, we learn, are not distributed by chance: disease is a result of a breaking of some of God's laws of health. It is always so, but sometimes the laws are broken ignorantly. However that may be, the return of health is God's gift, and comes only by obedience to those very laws of His which we have broken.

The next part of the Psalm, from verse 23 to verse 31, is one of the few allusions we have in Hebrew poetry to the dangers of a sailor's life. We English people are accustomed to the sea; all our history, for many hundreds of years, is full of stories of the bravery of our sailors. But when a storm arises, the feeling that nothing that man can do can make it abate is as strong as ever it could have been in the minds of those old Hebrews, who knew scarcely anything of the sea and of sailors. Our sailors still see

the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. When they are tossed up and down by the waves with, as is often said, only a plank or a thin plate of iron between them and death, they know that their power is as nothing. They must wait, for they can do nothing else, until the storm subsides and the waves are at rest.

Our great sailing-ships and ocean-steamers are, of course, far better able to resist the violence of the storm than the weak boats which were called ships hundreds of years ago. Still a storm makes sailors even now acknowledge a Power greater than their own. And perhaps it would be wise if we thought, a little more frequently than we do, that all the improvements that have been made in ship-building, and the life-boats and other means for saving life from shipwrecks, are really as much the results of God's providence as a sudden cessation of a storm at sea would be. For God has given men understanding and skill to make them.

The last division of the Psalm teaches us that there is a reason for all God's dealings with us, and that the more thoroughly we are convinced of this, the more reverently we try to discover God's reasons, so much the more shall we grow in wisdom, and in understanding 'the lovingkindness of the Lord.'

LESSON 140.

Read Psalm cxxxix.

THIS Psalm has been chosen to complete a series. The last three (the 104th, the 107th, and this, the 139th) mark a distinct advance of thought. First, we had God's glory in nature; next, His goodness in Providence; now, we have displayed to us His knowledge of each man, and His care for each. The Psalm is strictly personal. The writer, David, as the title says, seems to feel that in the most important of all matters, the guidance of his thoughts and wishes, he is alone with God. From the beginning to the end this idea is foremost; from the words, 'O Lord, Thou hast searched me out,' to the prayer with which the Psalm closes, 'Lead me in the way everlasting,' there is an outpouring of the Psalmist's thoughts, an opening of his heart to God. It is indeed what we may call a meditation rather than a hymn—something for one person to read rather than for many to sing.

The idea or leading thought of the Psalm is one of the most strengthening and most comforting that ever entered into a good man's mind. The thought that we are never alone, that every deed is seen, every thought known, by a Being of infinite power, is a thought full of comfort, especially in times of sorrow and temptation, when we may gain strength and consolation by remembering that the Being who so constantly watches over us is our Creator and Preserver, the Giver of life and of all life's blessings.

God's perfect knowledge of all our deeds, and even of our thoughts is expressed most strikingly in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th verses, in which David says, 'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.' Such thoughts may well impress upon us the importance of a duty which we have considered in several lessons, namely the duty of submitting our most secret thoughts and wishes to strict control: none of them can be so secret but that God knows them. Yet we shall learn a fuller lesson if we explain the verses just read by words very similar to them from another Psalm, 'Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. . . . The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.'

The comfort which this sense of God's perfect knowledge gives is still further increased by the thought which comes to the Psalmist's mind, that wherever he may be, whithersoever he may go, still he will never be out of God's presence. We found, when we were considering some of the early chapters of the Bible, that one way in which sin brings its own punishment is by making the sinner feel at a distance from God. Here we have the very opposite of all that; the good man finds a reward of his trust in God in the knowledge that God is never at a distance from him. In the heaven or in the grave, in his own native land or in the most distant parts of the earth, in darkness or in light, God is ever near, and the good man rejoices in His presence.

The 14th, 15th, and 16th verses carry on the same train of thought with reference to the human body. Let us read them again, and try to impress them on our minds: 'I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in Thy book were all my members written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.'

These verses describe exactly the sense of wonder which must fill the mind of a thoughtful and religious man when he thinks of the growth of his body. There was a time when he was not, and after that, his body was formed gradually and secretly, he knows not how. How could the members of the body have been made, so exquisitely fitted for the various duties they have to perform? The answer which the Psalmist finds to

this question is still the true answer, namely, that it was by God's power.

Let us try by all means to bear this in mind ; to remember that our bodies, fearfully and wonderfully made, are made and sustained by God. Then we shall understand that our duty is to use those bodies and all the faculties with which they are endowed, not for any evil ends, but for fulfilling God's holy will and commandments. The Apostle Paul puts this moral lesson in very few and very plain words. He says, 'Glorify God,' that is, 'set forth His praise' 'in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

The Psalm concludes with a prayer, in which David asks that God, who knows all about him, will be his constant helper. He prays thus : 'Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

Now all that we have heard about God's constant watching and God's perfect knowledge of David is true of everyone of us. He knows whether we are trying to do right, or carelessly allowing ourselves to go wrong. We can never get out of God's sight ; although few of our fellow-men may know all our deeds, and none of them can know all our thoughts, God knows both our deeds and our thoughts. The remembrance of this truth will keep us from many evil deeds and wishes, and will lead us into the way of righteousness. God knows our bad deeds and bad thoughts, and He will surely call us to account for them. But He also knows our good deeds and thoughts, and will never forget them or leave them unrewarded.

LESSON 141.

Read Isaiah i.

A FULL account of the office and work of the Hebrew Prophets, would occupy a far larger number of lessons than we can include in the space and time remaining to us. It seems advisable, therefore, to say a few general words on the subject, to read typical chapters from each of three Prophetical Books, those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and after that to devote one lesson to the Books of the Minor Prophets.

First of all ; what is a prophet ? The usual reply is, A man who is able to tell beforehand things which are about to happen. This answer is partly true ; but does not contain the whole of the truth. A prophet is sometimes a foreteller, that is, one who declares future events ; but he always has a message for the present time ; he has received from God such wisdom as enables him to declare God's will to his fellow-men. The clearest description of

a prophet given in the Bible is in the words, 'The man whose eyes are open.'¹

Of the great number of prophets who lived and prophesied in Palestine between the time of Samuel and that of Malachi, only a few have left books in which their prophecies are written. Most of them delivered their teaching in the name of God, and left it to the memories of the people.

Of written books of prophecy there are usually counted two classes; the first called the Books of the Major or Greater Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; the second, called the Books of the Minor or Lesser Prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The chapter which we have just read from the Book of Isaiah contains what we may call an abstract or a summary of his writings. It gives in a very brief form the principles which are developed in the rest of the Book.

First, it fixes the dates of the prophecies. From the reign of Uzziah to that of Hezekiah, Isaiah was the leading man of Judah. In our lessons on the history of the period, we have seen how important a share Isaiah took in the politics of his time. His book gives us his moral and religious teaching. But we can scarcely understand that teaching without recalling for a few minutes the facts of the history, so far at any rate as may enable us to realise the moral condition of the people. The time was one of great changes, and of changes which, to a man who looked only at the outward form, appeared to be decided improvements. In Hezekiah's reign, for example, idolatry was, to all appearance, rooted out of Judah. Instead of offering sacrifices to false gods, the people offered to Jehovah; instead of observing the feasts of idol worship, they observed the feasts appointed in the Law of Moses; they rediscovered, as one may say, that Law, and were careful to obey to the letter all its injunctions. 'How promising a change! What a wonderful reformation!' So would most people say; but Isaiah, the man whose eyes were open, did not say anything of the kind. He knew that the temper and spirit of many of his fellow-countrymen were unchanged, that the new ceremonies were observed too much as mere ceremonies, just as the old had been. Therefore he did not deceive himself or those to whom he spoke, into the belief that all things would go well; he knew that things must go ill, because men had forgotten God, although they were

¹ The etymologies of the Hebrew terms used in the Bible to describe the office of prophet are rather uncertain; that of the word 'prophet,' however, is well ascertained. 'Pro-

phètes' is a Greek word which means 'one who speaks for God, and interprets His will to men.'—*Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon*.

pretending to worship Him. This is the ground of Isaiah's complaint against Judah and Jerusalem, and for the cure of the evil he was enabled to unfold a great principle, namely, that God does not approve of mere outward and formal obedience, without the deep obedience of the heart. To those who disobey because they know no better, Isaiah constantly addresses words of instruction, of encouragement, and hope. For those, on the other hand, who fancy that they can win God's favour by outwardly doing His will, while they are really only pleasing themselves, he has nothing but rebuke and threatening of evil.

There is scarcely a passage in the Old Testament, perhaps none, which speaks more plainly concerning these matters than the eleven verses which begin at verse 10 of this chapter. The people had evidently thought to please God by sacrifices, by observing Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts. Speaking in God's name, Isaiah calls all these observances, dictated as they were by a selfish spirit, abominations. But he tells them what would be pleasing to God, namely, that they should 'cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.' And if they do that, they need not be afraid that their past evil deeds will be remembered against them; for he tells them, also in God's name, 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' From the frequent occurrence of such expressions in his writings, Isaiah is often called the Evangelical Prophet, that is, the Prophet of the Gospel, or of good news to men.

LESSON 142.

Read Jeremiah xxxvi.

THIS chapter from the Book of Jeremiah gives an account of a very important part of his personal history. It has been chosen for reading rather than a part of his prophecy, for two reasons: 1st, because it is very difficult to find a passage which sums up his teaching as our last reading did that of Isaiah; and 2ndly, because an understanding of the relations between Jeremiah and his king and countrymen is the best preparation for future reading and understanding of the long book of his writings. The time in which Jeremiah lived—that is, the reigns of the last kings of Judah, and the beginning of the Captivity—was very unlike that of Isaiah. Instead of even outward reformation there was a kind of stagnation among the people. There were no gleams of hope, such as there had been when Hezekiah was on the throne; the bonds of Babylon were being drawn closer and closer round the nation of the Jews, and the end of the kingdom was near at hand. The message sent

by God through Jeremiah, under these circumstances, was widely different from that which Isaiah had conveyed to Hezekiah. Jeremiah was commanded to declare that the city should be given up into the hands of the king of Babylon, and even to advise his countrymen to surrender it to him at once, instead of making him more furious against them by fruitless attempts at resistance. The message was a hard one for any Jew to declare, and most of all for Jeremiah, whose timid nature had made him try again and again to avoid the declaration, even when he knew that the message came from God. His position was rendered more difficult by the fact that other men, calling themselves prophets of God, were all the time giving advice directly contrary to what he gave. They appealed to the past, and especially to Isaiah's words, that Jerusalem should *not* be destroyed, for they were unable to see that in the interval between Isaiah and Jeremiah all the circumstances of the nation had changed. The king, the princes, and the majority of the people, listened rather to the false prophets than to Jeremiah, choosing to believe what they wished to believe. They even accused Jeremiah of hating his own country and favouring the Babylonians. How bitter such an accusation must have been to the prophet, we may judge from some words of his showing how he loved his country, and how deeply he was grieved at being obliged to speak of its downfall. The ninth chapter of his book begins: 'Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' But the accusation was pressed against him so fiercely that he was one day in imminent danger of being put to death in a tumult of the people. That danger roused him, as danger often rouses timid men, to bravery. He stood, facing the raging crowd, and said: 'The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house (the Temple) and against this city (Jerusalem) all the words that ye have heard. . . . As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.' Jeremiah's fearlessness, and the intercession of a few staunch friends, saved his life; he was, however, imprisoned, and it was from his prison that he sent forth the roll of which we have been reading to-day.

In this passage of the history we must specially observe the firmness of Jeremiah and the folly of the king of Judah. The command came to Jeremiah that he should cause to be written in a book, that is, on a roll of parchment, all the prophecies which he had spoken against Jerusalem. These were the prophecies, we

must remember, which had brought Jeremiah into trouble, and the writing of them would awaken all the old feeling of dislike against him. But still he did what he was commanded to do, and when the first roll was burnt, he had another made, so that at all risks his words might be preserved. The folly of Jehoiakim, in burning the roll which contained the words of the prophecy, as if that could prevent the fulfilment of them, seems almost beyond belief. Yet it is what people constantly do. When they are warned that they are doing wrong, they try to silence the person who warns them, and if they succeed, they fancy that they have made all safe. But all that they have done is to make their wrong, and therefore their punishment, all the greater. The old words are once more written down, and there are 'added besides unto them many like words.' The sad side of the life and the prophecies of Jeremiah has been most dwelt upon in this lesson, because that is most characteristic of him, so much so that he is often called 'the weeping prophet.' But even he had some message of hope to deliver. He told the people that God had not forsaken them, but would make them better men by the punishment. He was about to send upon them, and that when they had received the benefit which calamity was designed to bring them, they should once more be restored to their own land.

Jeremiah's prophecies were fulfilled. Jerusalem was taken, and the Jews were made captives. During the Captivity Jeremiah wrote a series of poems of most pathetic sadness, in which he grieved over the destruction of the city and the Temple. These poems, collected into one book, follow the Book of Jeremiah in our Bibles, with the name 'The Lamentations of Jeremiah.'

LESSON 143.

Read Ezekiel xxxvii. 1—14.

THE contrast between the tone of the prophecy of Ezekiel and that of Jeremiah is even more marked than the contrast between Jeremiah and Isaiah. Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Captivity of the Jews, and witnessed the fulfilment of his predictions. Ezekiel's prophetic work began very early in the Captivity. He was one of the first captives, and his first prophecies were delivered by the river Chebar, a tributary of the Tigris, before Jerusalem had fallen. These early prophecies are marked by a sadness almost as deep as Jeremiah's: but as soon as the news came of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, the prophet's courage seemed to revive. As long as the Temple stood, he had mourned for the sorrows of his native land; when it had fallen under the hand of Nebuzaradan, he turned his thoughts to the renewal promised by God.

The spirits of the Jews had sunk to the lowest point; their troubles had humiliated them, and led to a beginning of amendment. Sorrow for their past offences became the characteristic feature of their mental condition. Such a change, from pride to humility, and from wilfulness to repentance, was most salutary, but there was a certain danger in the continuance of that new temper. It might sink into despair, and then the benefit of affliction would be lost. Ezekiel's duty, or one great part of it, was to explain the reason of the punishment that had come upon the Jews, to show that there was no injustice in the punishment, and also to give them courage to bear their sufferings, by leading them to look forward to their restoration. It is their restoration that forms the subject of the passage of his prophecy which we have read to-day. That fact is sufficient to make the reading an important one.

But before we examine the meaning of the passage, let us turn our attention to its form. The prophets did not always speak to the people with equal plainness. Sometimes their words were called parables, that is, words of deeper meaning than appears on the surface. Of a prophetic parable we have a good example in the first part of the passage we have now read. It speaks of dry bones, but it means the people of Judah.

And, besides, God's message did not always come to the prophet in the same manner: sometimes thoughts came into the prophet's mind, which he put into his own words; sometimes the very words he was to use were so strongly impressed upon him that they seemed to be put into his mouth; at other times he fell into a kind of trance, and saw the teaching he was to deliver presented as in a picture; this last form was called revelation by visions, and is the form of the prophecy we are now considering.

There is a vagueness and vastness about the scenery of this vision which is very attractive to the mind, but which can hardly be explained. The wide, open valley full of dry bones, the very dwelling-place of death, is made a habitation of life. But in the gradual change, as it seemed to pass before the prophet's eyes, there must have been something very weird and awful from its very grandeur. The shaking of the dry bones, and their motion each to each, as the long-separated joints reunited, and then the slow covering of the bones with sinew, flesh, and skin, must have filled the prophet's mind with awe. And when at last the forms of the bodies were restored, and all was there but life, the awfulness of the sight is almost greater than we can imagine. But the form was not the life. The prophet was told to call to the four winds to breathe upon the slain, that they might live. And as he spoke, the life came into the dead forms, and they rose and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. This was the vision;

the interpretation of it, as far as the Jews were concerned, is very plainly given in the verses which follow.

Their hopes of return to their own land were as dead as the dry bones of the vision: they felt themselves cut off from the past history of their nation. And certainly they could not restore themselves. The sorrow and humiliation which at that time characterised them, were like the moving, the noise, and the shaking of the dry bones, and their lately-renewed obedience to the Law was very probably intended to be figured by the growth of flesh and sinew on the bones. It was the form of a new being without the new life. That could only come by the direct inspiration of God. By His Spirit they should live, and should know that their new life was His gift.

What was true more than 2,000 years ago of the Jewish nation is true of many nations and societies now. Again and again we find nations or societies apparently dead. The dry bones lie scattered on the ground, with no bond of union. But a prophetic word is spoken, a word which is none the less inspired because we cannot tell how it comes, and then we can trace some movement, some stir as of life. Such movements often present scenes which appal rather than please us; we think harm is done, because there is a noise and a shaking. Yet, if we trust in God, we ought to believe that He knows better than we do how life may be breathed into dead societies, and that what we are alarmed at is really the first step towards renewal.

In a previous lesson attention was drawn to a statement often made by scholars, namely, that during the Babylonian exile, the hope of the Jews in a future life was strengthened, if not first kindled. Some of the best and wisest, David for example, had held the hope long before; but it was during the exile that it became an article of the national creed. It would be interesting to inquire how much such prophecies as this of Ezekiel contributed to the change. We may well believe their influence to have been very great.

LESSON 144.

Read Isaiah xl.¹

THE latter part of the Book of Isaiah, from the 40th chapter to the 66th, refers to a time long after that which is described so exactly, with all its sins and hopes and fears, in the former part, which we have considered already. The immediate reference of the prophecy

¹ This lesson is put after those on Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to avoid the confusion of chronology which would be likely to be caused in the minds of young persons, if they found the

deliverance from the Captivity the subject of a lesson preceding that in which the Captivity is spoken of as a future event.

of Isaiah in the former part of the book is to Judah in the time of Ahaz and Hezekiah, long before the Captivity; in the latter part of the book reference is to Babylon, and to a time a few years before the return of the Jews from their exile in that distant land. In order that we may take in the meaning of these twenty-six chapters, which have been called the Great Prophecy of Israel's Restoration, we must briefly recapitulate some of the leading facts of the histories of Israel, Judah, Assyria, and Babylon. We have already considered them separately; but if we now put them together we shall understand their mutual relations, and shall be able to realise the comfort which this great prophecy must have given to Isaiah's countrymen in captivity.

In the year 722 B.C. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, took Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel, and carried the ten tribes of Israel into captivity beyond the river. Assyria was then at the height of its power. Of the nations subject to it, Babylon, Persia, and Media were the chief, and its one great rival was the kingdom of Egypt. Between Assyria and Egypt was the small kingdom of Judah, the rulers of which were disposed to consider favourably an alliance with Egypt.

Judah was left, as we have seen, when the kingdom of Israel fell, but it was not left in independence. Its kings were compelled to pay tribute to Assyria. By the help of Egypt, it was thought, Judah might throw off the yoke of Assyria and regain its freedom. But the prophets of God, and especially Isaiah, very earnestly dissuaded the Jews from seeking any such alliance. He urged Hezekiah not to 'lean on a broken reed,' that is, not to trust to Egypt, but to have faith in God. In pursuance of Isaiah's advice Hezekiah, in 714 B.C., refused to continue payment of the Assyrian tribute, and brought down upon himself and his people the anger of Sennacherib, who invaded Judah and Egypt. Either before Jerusalem, or between Jerusalem and the Egyptian frontier, Sennacherib's army perished by a mysterious doom, and Sennacherib himself returned to Assyria. Before his departure he threatened to come again and destroy Jerusalem, but his threat was never carried out. He had other work to do nearer home. Babylon rebelled against him, and for a time was independent. Sennacherib reduced Babylon again to subjection, but in the reign of his successor the province was lost again, and the decline of Assyria began. In 625 B.C. the king of Babylon made alliance with Media and Persia, which also had been subject to Assyria, and the allies destroyed Nineveh, and completed the ruin of Assyria. Babylon and Media divided the Assyrian empire between them. In 588 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took Jerusalem, and carried away Zedekiah, king of Judah, and the chief part of his people into

captivity. But disputes arose between the Babylonian and Medo-Persian kings, in which the latter prevailed. In 541 B.C., Cyrus the Persian, having subdued many other cities of Asia, turned his arms against Babylon.

The feeling of the Jews at this time is described as follows by Dr. Matthew Arnold:—‘Against their enslaver and oppressor the Jewish exiles in Babylon saw uplifted the irresistible sword of God’s instrument, this Persian prince, to whose religion the Babylonian idolatry was hateful; a victorious warrior, a wise and just statesman, favourable to Babylon’s prisoners and victims, and disposed to restore the exiles of Judah to their own land. Assyria had fallen. Babylon was now falling; and in this supreme hour is heard the voice of God’s prophets, commanded to comfort God’s people, as follows:¹ “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.”’

The chapter which we have read to-day is the introduction to this great series of comforting prophecies. There are many passages, even in this single chapter, to the illustration of each of which we might devote a whole lesson, but there are not many actual difficulties, and we must be satisfied with noticing one or two points.

The first eight verses plainly refer to the return of the people to Jerusalem after their punishment, the purposes of their punishment being accomplished. If we bear this in mind we shall see more beauty than we could otherwise see in that passage, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’

Then, in verses 9 to 17, God’s power and majesty are declared, and with them are contrasted, in verses 18 to 25, the folly and weakness of idolatry.

The verse, ‘He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation, &c.,’ is perhaps a little difficult. Its meaning, however, is, that if a man be too poor to have one of the expensive gold and silver images mentioned in the verse before, still he thinks he must have a god, and therefore he makes one of wood, which by its size shall compensate for its cheapness. So the words are words of bitter scorn of idols and idol-worship.

The end of the chapter assures the Jews that God’s power and strength shall be given to them to comfort and support them in their toils: ‘they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.’

¹ ‘The Great Prophecy of Israel’s Restoration,’ by Matthew Arnold, D.C.L., p. xxxviii. If the teacher has time, the exposition of these

chapters given in this little book will be found to supply excellent material for a series of lessons to an advanced class of scholars.

LESSON 145.

The Minor Prophets.

THE books of the twelve minor or lesser prophets were written at times which from first to last spread over a very long period.

These prophets are not called 'minor,' or 'less,' because they are of less authority than Isaiah or Jeremiah and the other major or greater prophets, but only because the writings they have left are so much shorter. The words *major* and *minor*, or greater and less, refer solely to the length of the respective books, and not to the character or influence of the men who wrote them.

In our lesson to-day we shall take the books of these minor prophets in the order of time; that order is slightly different from the order in which they are printed in our Bibles.

The most ancient of the twelve prophets was Jonah, whose book can scarcely be called a book of prophecy. It is rather a history of a short part of the Prophet's life. He was a native of the northern kingdom, and aided Jeroboam II. in his attempts to strengthen that kingdom after the frequent wars with Syria. What, however, we read in the book which bears his name has no connexion with Israel. Jonah was sent to prophesy against Nineveh. He was afraid or unwilling to fulfil God's bidding, and tried to flee by sea to Tarshish. On his voyage he incurred great peril, but was saved by a great deliverance, after which he did obey God's command. The men of Nineveh repented of their sins, and their city was spared.

Next to Jonah comes a group, of which we cannot determine the exact order. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, and Nahum, were more or less contemporary with each other, and with the prophet Isaiah.

Of these Hosea was an Israelite prophet, and the main subject of his teaching is the evil which would surely follow from the idolatry of the Israelites.

Joel appears to have been the first of the (writing) prophets of Judah. In his book we have the earliest indication of coming evil to that kingdom. The threatenings are indefinite, but the sense of awe with which they must have been heard cannot have been diminished by that fact.

Amos was a native of Judah, but was sent to proclaim God's judgments on the worshippers of the golden calf at Bethel, so that his mission was to Israel. Amos is to some extent an exception to a rule. Generally the prophets were men who had had some training to prepare them for their work, but the message came to Amos, a shepherd, without any previous preparation. His writings are

full, as we might expect, of references to natural objects, such as his early life would have accustomed him to see and think about.

Micah, the next named, prophesied both to Israel and Judah. His book is short, and in some places hard to understand. It contains some passages which are very remarkable. One of these is the prophecy of the coming of a great Deliverer and King from Bethlehem, a prophecy which we believe to have been fulfilled in the birth of Christ. Another is a passage of wonderful force and beauty; namely, 'He' (that is God) 'hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

Nahum's prophecy, again, refers to a nation outside of Israel. Nineveh's repentance after Jonah's preaching was short-lived; the old evils returned with more than their old power, and Nahum was commanded to proclaim the doom of the evil city.

The remaining prophets are all Jewish, or belonging to the tribe of Judah. Habakkuk and Zephaniah are both believed to have prophesied in the reign of Josiah, and therefore just before the time of Jeremiah. Zephaniah, we know, did prophesy then, and from some resemblances in the writings of the two it is inferred that they lived at or about the same time. The close of Habakkuk's prophecy is considered to be one of the sublimest passages of Hebrew poetry that remain to us.

The prophecy of Obadiah is believed to be of the time of the Captivity in Babylon; in that case, Obadiah would be contemporary with Ezekiel.

This Obadiah, the prophet, must not be confounded with another man of the same name who was Prime Minister of Ahab, King of Israel.

Haggai and Zechariah were the prophets of the return from the Babylonian Captivity. To the encouragement given to the princes, the priests, and the people, by these two prophets, was due the rebuilding of the Temple and the re-establishment of order and beauty in the Temple worship.

Malachi, the last of the prophets, lived, or at any rate delivered his prophecy, late in the time of Nehemiah. His book is a mixture of hope and fear; he knew that if the Jews would obey God, all would be well, but if they disobeyed Him, worse would befall than had ever yet befallen them. The last verses of his book, the last words of the Old Testament, show this double feeling: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'

NOTE. Throughout this lesson I have availed myself of the con-

clusions as to date, etc., of the minor prophets, which are given as most probable by the writers of the various articles 'Hosea,' 'Joel,' 'Amos,' etc., in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible.'

LESSON 146.

The Book of Proverbs, i.

PROVERBS have been defined as many men's wisdom and one man's wit. The general idea of instruction, reproof, or advice which they contain, may have been for a long time common to many men; but at last one man puts the thought into a few striking words, which so catch the attention and impress themselves upon the memory of other men, that when the thought is again needed these words and no others are used to express it. Such proverb-making goes on in all lands where instruction is chiefly given by word of mouth; it used to be common in England, but since books have come into general use, very few new proverbs have been made, and many old ones have been almost lost. To collect and arrange the proverbs most frequently in the mouths of the people of any country used to be regarded as a work not unworthy of the wisest men of the country, who very often added to their collections a few (or many) short, pithy maxims of their own, which gradually became absorbed into the body of the national proverbs. There is every reason to believe that the Book of Proverbs, which is one of those books of the Bible which we may call books of wisdom, was made in this manner. The wise King Solomon collected the Proverbs which were in use in Israel, and added many of his own. His share, indeed, is supposed to be very great. The book, as we have it, consists of five parts, of which the second is, according to its title, Solomon's own original collection, and the third is a collection, made in the time of Hezekiah, of Proverbs ascribed to Solomon as their author. The first part is of a different character, and will be best treated in a separate lesson; the fourth and fifth parts are not connected with Solomon in any way.

The Proverbs, using the word in the sense already explained, are contained in twenty chapters, fifteen of which belong to the original collection, and five compose the addition made in Hezekiah's reign. The purposes of the Proverbs are very various; prudence, temperance, and chastity are strongly recommended; idleness and falsehood are shown to be causes of ruin; and the blessings of peace are described very forcibly. We may say that there is a store, almost inexhaustible, of worldly wisdom and religious philosophy laid up in these twenty chapters. In a single lesson it is impossible to give more than a few samples from this mine, with a hint or two as to the way in which we may gather some of

this wealth of instruction for ourselves. We will enumerate a few of the subjects spoken of, and set down under each head some of the Proverbs in which that subject is most pointedly referred to. We will begin with

I. INDUSTRY, and take a few Proverbs which show the blessing of diligence, and the misery of idleness or sloth. 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.'—Chapter xiii. 4. 'He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.'—Chapter xviii. 9. 'Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.'—Chapter xix. 15. 'The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.'—Chapter xx. 4. Of these it is hard to say which is the most striking, but the last is very important for us to remember. Youth is our time of ploughing; we must be diligent in youth if we hope ever to prosper, for it will be too late to begin ploughing when the time of harvest is come. Another passage on the same subject is very interesting, inasmuch as it shows the use which Solomon made of his knowledge of natural history.—'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.'—Chapter vi. 6-8.

II. KINDNESS OF HEART, SHOWN IN WORD OR DEED. 'Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.'—Chapter x. 12. 'A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.'—Chapter xii. 16. 'A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.'—Chapter xv. 1. And one more, showing that this kindness of heart should be the rule in our family life: 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.'—Chapter xv. 17.

III. THE ABOMINABLENESS OF LYING, AND GOD'S LOVE OF TRUTH. 'The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.'—Chapter xii. 19. 'Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are His delight.'—Chapter xii. 22. 'A righteous man hateth lying.'—Chapter xiii. 5.

IV. HUMILITY AND MODESTY. 'When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.'—Chapter xi. 2. 'Before honour is humility.'—Chapter xv. 33. 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.'—Chapter xvi. 18.

Nearly all the preceding are Proverbs of worldly wisdom; we must add some which bring in religious thoughts.

V. TRUST IN GOD. Worldly wisdom and prudence are very necessary, but if they are used without trust in God they are of

no real service. 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord.'—Chapter xxi. 30, 31. The preparation of the horse is here taken as a type or picture of all kinds of preparation which men can make.

VI. DUTY TOWARDS GOD. Lastly, there are many Proverbs which tell us that our hearts must be true, otherwise our actions cannot be acceptable to God; and that actions of common honesty must not be neglected for what we call religious duties. Such Proverbs are these: 'All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.'—Chapter xvi. 2, 3. 'To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.'—Chapter xxi. 3.

LESSON 147.

The Book of Proverbs, ii. (with a few words on Ecclesiastes).

It was noticed in the last lesson that the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs have a character different from the rest of the book. To these nine chapters we cannot apply the name Proverbs in the sense in which we ordinarily use the word in English. They are a direct personal exhortation to some person whom the author addresses as 'my son,' and set forth the praise of Wisdom and the dispraise of Folly under several similitudes. It is probable that we may interpret this difference in a simple manner. The wise King Solomon made the collection of Proverbs contained in chapters ten to twenty-four, both included, chiefly for the guidance of his son Rehoboam, and, having made the collection, wrote the first nine chapters as an introduction, or as an inducement to Rehoboam to undertake the study of them. If this is the true explanation, there are very few, if any, parts of the Bible which give rise to thoughts so sad as those which come into our minds when we compare these earnest exhortations to diligence and wisdom with the folly which Rehoboam displayed in those acts of his life with which we are acquainted. Still, if the young man for whom these words were written did not learn what he might have learnt from them, we ought to be thankful that they have been preserved for us, and to try to make a better use of them than he did.

One sentence, which probably is the key to the understanding of these nine chapters, shows that the wisdom so highly praised is something very much greater and better than mere worldly prudence. Very near the commencement we find the sentence, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,' and very near the

end almost the same words ('wisdom' instead of 'knowledge' is the only change) are repeated.

All through this part of the book, Wisdom is represented as a person who calls to the simple, and begs them to receive her gifts of knowledge and instruction. At the same time, she is represented as inexorably stern to those who wilfully refuse to obey her call. None of her treasures are for them, but only shame and confusion. The wise man chooses wisdom, and reaps the natural reward of his wise choice, even life and goodness; the foolish man refuses wisdom, and shall eat of the fruit of his own way, and be filled with his own devices. Of course, if wisdom be the fear of God, the consequences thus described must extend beyond the present life; but there is an application to this life which is important for us to consider. Knowledge and instruction are offered to the young, but nobody can make them take the offered gifts. Those who try to teach to the young lessons which will be of use in this world and in the world to come, cannot make them diligent in learning, any more than they can make them good. They do their best to induce young people to choose wisdom (of both kinds), but the choice is for each one. Let us once more insist upon this fact, that those who are careless and idle in youth, almost always grow up to be ignorant and useless men and women; and that those who in youth choose to be untruthful and selfish, grow up to be wicked. On the other hand, those who choose to be diligent and good, grow up with those good habits strengthened, and with God's blessing will do good to all with whom they have any connexions. Now let us listen to a few of the pieces of advice contained in the part of the book of which a general account has just been given. 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.'—Chapter iii. 5-7. In the last verse, true wisdom and false wisdom, or self-conceit, are put into direct contrast; for, as we have reason to believe, the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom is the chief subject of this series of chapters. In a later chapter, Wisdom is represented as saying, 'Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. . . . I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea durable riches and righteousness.'—Chapter viii. 10, 17, 18. Many men who have gained wealth, and have found it transitory, have wished that they had never set their minds upon its acquisition; but no man ever regretted his devotion in youth to the pursuit of the durable riches of knowledge and goodness.

One book of the Bible remains to be spoken of, which is also a book of wisdom. Its name is Ecclesiastes, and it begins with words which show that it is an account of the thoughts of Solomon, when he had sunk to folly, and tried to procure false and fleeting pleasures. It is a book into the interpretation of which we cannot even enter now; the experience of life alone can interpret it, and even that, perhaps, only in part. But its last words explain themselves, and form a fitting close for our last Old Testament lesson: 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.'—Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

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LESSON 148.

Introduction to the New Testament.

THE New Testament is a collection of 27 books, which are thus arranged:—The Four Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, The Twenty-one Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation.

The word 'Gospel' is derived from two Saxon words which mean 'good news.' The word Gospel frequently occurs in the New Testament, and is used there to describe the message delivered by the first Christian teachers, not the books in which those messages were written. In the course of time, however, the meaning has been extended, so as to embrace the record of the message, as well as the message itself. When now we speak of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, or St. John, we mean the book ascribed to St. Matthew or St. John as its author. Each of the books, which we call Gospels, contains an account of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The authors of two of the Gospels, St. Matthew and St. John, were of the number of the twelve apostles; that is, were appointed by Christ Himself to publish the facts of His life, and the truths which He taught. The authors of the other two, St. Mark and St. Luke, were friends and fellow-labourers with Christ's immediate followers. The study of all the four Gospels is necessary for the attainment of a full knowledge of Christ's life and teaching; for the same sayings and doings are not invariably recorded in all of them.

The part of the New Testament called 'The Acts of the Apostles' relates the doings and teaching of Christ's immediate followers, and the first Christian converts, after His resurrection; and was written by St. Luke, the author of the third Gospel.

The Epistles are, as their name implies, letters, and were written by Christ's disciples after His resurrection. With the ex-

ception of a few, addressed to private individuals, these letters were addressed to the various Christian Churches which were growing up in different parts of Western Asia and Southern Europe. They are almost wholly devoted to making known the rules of Christian faith and duty. The advice they contain was generally given in the language of encouragement and exhortation; but when any church was wandering from the truth, sharp reproofs were used. They were all written by men who either had been companions of our Saviour or were fellow-workers with His companions, and who, with these advantages, addressed themselves to what their actual observation had shown them to be the practical wants and dangers of the Christian Churches. Of these Epistles, no fewer than thirteen were written by St. Paul, a disciple of whose conversion and call to be an apostle we read in the Acts of the Apostles; others were written by St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude.

The Book of the Revelation was written by St. John, and addressed primarily to the Seven Churches of Asia. The language is singularly striking and beautiful, but it is not a book of which an adequate general description can be given in an introductory lesson like the present.

It will be impossible in this limited course of lessons to go through the whole New Testament in the careful manner in which it ought to be read. Selections for reading have therefore been made, including the whole of the Gospel of St. Luke, and of the Acts of the Apostles; these readings will be supplemented by the introduction, in the comments upon them, of passages from the other Gospels and the Epistles.

There are certain preliminary questions, some general information concerning which may help us to understand better some portions of the Scriptural narrative. Such questions are the following:—

1. What were the political relations between the Romans and the Jews at the time of Christ's birth and the commencement of His ministry?
2. What were the expectations as to the coming of the Messiah which prevailed among the Jews? Both of these influenced, sometimes favourably and sometimes unfavourably, His reception by the Jews.
3. What was the condition of religious parties in Palestine at the time of His coming? A knowledge of this throws additional light on many passages of His life and teaching.

The three following lessons will be devoted to an examination of the principal points which these three questions suggest.

LESSON 149.

The Political Relations between the Romans and the Jews.

It was mentioned in a lesson on the connection of the Old and New Testaments (Lesson 133), that the Romans conquered Palestine, but did not immediately take it into their own dominions. They appointed a king, Herod, commonly called the Great, who was to a certain extent an independent sovereign; but they reserved to themselves the right of confirming, or refusing to confirm, his successor. At Herod's death, which took place very soon after our Saviour's birth, his dominions were divided among his sons: the northern part, Galilee, was given to Herod Antipas; the southern part, Judæa, was given to Archelaus. About twelve years afterwards, the Jews of Judæa complained to the Romans that they were grossly misgoverned by Archelaus. He was summoned to Rome to give an account of his conduct, and in the end was deprived of his authority and sent into banishment, a few years before our Saviour began to teach. Judæa was then placed under the rule of a procurator, an officer appointed by the Roman Emperor, and acting, to a certain extent, under the control of the governor, or prefect, of the larger province of Syria. At the time of the first appointment, Quirinus was the governor of the province. His name will be found in the gospel of St. Luke, but nothing more: of procurators, on the other hand, we shall meet with Pontius Pilate, Felix, and Festus; they are called in our English New Testament 'governors,' but really they were procurators, persons under authority, and liable to be called upon at any moment to give account of the exercise of the powers entrusted to them.

It is very difficult to find out exactly how much of independence this new arrangement left to the Jews. We know that they had a Council, called the Sanhedrin,¹ which sat at Jerusalem, and was presided over by the chief priests; but we do not know the extent of the power which the Sanhedrin could exercise. The general policy of the Romans was to interfere as little as possible with the peculiar customs of the people whom they conquered, and it seems extremely probable that they did not depart from that policy in the case of the Jews. It appears that questions which could be decided at once by the Jewish Law, and which interested Jews alone, were left to the decision of the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin; while those questions which concerned Roman citizens, or had reference

¹ The name 'Sanhedrin' is a Jewish corruption of the Greek word 'Synhedrion,' meaning a 'Board of Councillors.'

to the peace of the whole province as a part of the Roman Empire, or which were likely to endanger the Roman power, were heard and judged by the Roman officer, the procurator. A confirmation of this view is derived from a fact which we learn from the Jewish historian Josephus, and which we find also hinted at, rather than plainly stated, in the New Testament, namely, that the usual residence of the Roman procurator was not Jerusalem, the chief city of the province, but a town on the sea coast, named, in honour of the Roman Emperors, Cæsarea. From Cæsarea, the procurator went up to Jerusalem, attended by his body-guard of Roman soldiers, to be present at the great feasts, when large multitudes of Jews were collected together, and when, consequently, there was more than ordinary danger of disturbance or revolt.

There is another matter of some interest, which is so closely connected with this question of the political relations between the Romans and the Jews that it may best be considered in this place. A proud, stiff-necked nation like the Jews, with very peculiar laws and customs, was likely to hate, and to be hated in return by, any other power which might conquer it, and Roman power in Palestine was purely the result of conquest. In the New Testament history, both in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, we find instances of individual Romans who were very friendly to individual Jews, or to certain Jewish towns. We should be glad to believe that such instances were common enough to mitigate to some considerable degree the mutual enmity between the two races, the contempt of the Romans for the Jews, and the bitter hatred of the Jews for the Romans. The materials which we have for the formation of a just judgment on this point are very scanty, but on the whole they lead us to the conclusion that such instances were very exceptional. The general feeling of the Jews is shown by the fact that in many of their later writings, which belong to this period, they give to the Romans the name of Idumeans, their bitterest enemies in the olden time. That of the Romans is shown in many passages of their poets and historians. One of the most accurate and fair of the Roman historians repeats without any hesitation many very silly and improbable stories to the discredit of the Jews, and speaks of their religion as a collection of absurd superstitions which had only their antiquity to recommend them. Another sure indication of the feeling on both sides is given by the actual facts of a great rebellion, which took place about forty years after our Saviour's crucifixion, and which ended in the utter ruin of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people. At the close of the next lesson we shall see how the bitterness with which the Jews felt the Roman conquest of their country, combined with the expectations they entertained of the coming of the Messiah, influenced

their reception of Jesus. What we must now impress on our minds is that the Jews were burning with shame at being the subjects of a people whom they regarded as in every way their inferiors.

LESSON 150.

Jewish Expectations of the Messiah.

At the time of which we are now speaking, the Jewish people were expecting a great deliverer, to whom they gave the name of Messiah. The word 'Messiah' is a Hebrew word, and means 'Anointed'; the word 'Christ,' with which we are more familiar is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title.¹ Some person anointed by God, and so set apart to confer great benefits upon the Jewish nation, was most anxiously looked for. This we know from heathen historians as well as from our Bibles. A Roman writer² says that 'throughout all the East an ancient and constant opinion had become prevalent, that a race of men should at that time go forth from Judæa and rule the whole world.'

To answer the question, How was it that such an expectation had arisen and grown strong? we must refer back to several passages of the Old Testament, and especially of the prophetic books. Very early indeed in the Book of Genesis we find words which encouraged such hopes. The promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head has always been understood as a promise of a deliverer from evil. To the great ancestor of the Jews, Abraham, the promise was made more definite; God told him that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Moses, before his death, told the people to expect the coming of a great teacher—a Prophet to whom they were to hearken. But it is at a later time, in the Psalms and in the Books of the Prophets, that we find promises made with clearness enough to lead the people to interpret these older words as promises of a Messiah. We will now read a few of these passages.

'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession' (Psalm ii. 6-8).

'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of

¹ In our general speech the words 'Christ' and 'Jesus' are used as if they were synonymous. The practice is too common to be corrected now, but the teacher should try, at all events, to make clear the distinction between the *title*, Christ,

and the *personal name*, Jesus. If this distinction be forgotten, many passages of the New Testament become quite unintelligible; e.g. Matt. ii. 4; xxii. 42; xxiv. 23; Luke xxiv. 26, 46.

² Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian*.

Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' (Zechariah ix. 9).

'But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from everlasting' (Micah v. 2).

'For thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts' (Haggai ii. 6, 7).

But one of the plainest and most encouraging of all the Prophecies is given by the prophet Isaiah (chapter xi. verses 1-10). 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.' This is a very important passage, for it shows the spiritual nature of Messiah's kingdom.

Besides these encouraging prophecies, there were others which spoke of pain and sorrow, even of death, as, for example, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and the words of Daniel, 'Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself' (Daniel ix. 26).

These examples are enough to show that the language of the prophets concerning the Messiah was open to very various interpretations; and, indeed, it was variously interpreted by the Jews. Some of them formed more selfish and earthly, others more

spiritual expectations of Messiah's coming. The general opinion, however, among them was that on His coming the Jewish nation would be raised to the highest point of earthly power and greatness, and that Israel was to lead, if not to rule, all other nations. The glory of Israel under the reign of the Messiah was not to be all material; it was believed that in His time other nations would seek to worship the One True God, and that, under the pure influence of that worship, a higher and purer tone of morality would prevail among mankind. It was a bright and glorious vision, and was all the dearer to the minds of the Jews because of the strong contrast it afforded to the miserable condition into which they had actually fallen. The harder the Roman yoke pressed upon them, the more eagerly did they cling to the hope of a coming Prince, who, as they believed, would set them free from that yoke.

If we bear in mind that this was the state of feeling among the Jews, as a nation, we shall the better understand two facts which are plainly shown in many parts of the Gospel narrative.

1. How reluctant the ruling party of the Jews were to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, when they found that He made no attempt to free them from the bondage of Rome, and when He declared that His kingdom was not of this world. (On this point see especially St. John vi. 14 and 15. The people said that Jesus was 'that prophet that should come into the world,' and Jesus knew that they were designing to 'take Him by force and make Him a king,' and therefore He left them and went away into the mountain Himself alone.)

2. How difficult it was for our Saviour's followers, even after they had been taught the spiritual nature of His kingdom, to believe that salvation was offered to anyone, except on the condition of his first becoming a Jew.

NOTE.—In selecting the Messianic prophecies which are given in this lesson, I have, as far as possible, put myself in the position of a Jew living at the commencement of the Christian era. Those which I have quoted are not those which *seem to me* the most definite; but they are all passages which have been interpreted of the Messiah in various writings of the Rabbis, which writings, on the whole, represent most accurately the traditions and interpretations current among the Jewish teachers in the 150 years or so before the fall of Jerusalem. For authorities, &c., see Professor Westcott's 'Introduction to the Study of the Gospels,' pp. 146-8 (3rd edition).

LESSON 151.

Religious Parties among the Jews.

THIS lesson will refer to the divisions of opinion on religious questions which existed among the Jews in our Saviour's time. At that time, speaking broadly, all the Jews were either Pharisees or Sadducees; and we hear so much of these sects in the New Testament that it is desirable for us to understand what were the main differences that distinguished them.

These two great parties were by no means equal in numbers. The great majority of the people were Pharisees. The Sadducees, though a much smaller party, were, however, far from powerless; the chief priests and rulers were, at the time we are considering, of their sect, and this fact secured for them a great deal of influence, which their numbers alone could not have given them.

The chief differences between the sects were the following:—

The Sadducees believed that the written books of Moses contained all the knowledge and all the commandments which God had revealed to him. The Pharisees, on the other hand, held that God had made other revelations to Moses, which he had communicated verbally to Joshua, and which had been passed on as traditions from generation to generation. The Pharisees maintained the authority of these traditions, on the ground that the silence of the written books of Moses on some questions of very great importance made it impossible to believe that those books contained all the revelations God had made to him. They held, for instance, that the written books did not say anything of the immortality of man's soul, and they declared that it was incredible that God should have made a revelation to Moses which left such a question as this in doubt. They contended, therefore, that the revelation which was written had been accompanied by other revelations which had been handed down by word of mouth. Among the truths which they said had been thus preserved was belief in the resurrection of the dead. To this distinguishing doctrine of the Pharisees, which the Sadducees denied, we shall find frequent references in the Gospels and the Acts.

But the Pharisees, having thus opened a door for adding to the written laws and teaching of Moses, did not stop with the doctrine of the resurrection. For years before our Saviour's birth, they had gone on imposing on their followers new religious forms and ceremonies which became most burdensome and oppressive. For instance, the regulations which they made as to the oil and the wick which should be used in the lamps lighted in honour of the Sabbath, would fill a whole page of this book. The same may be

said of the appointment of the hours of prayer, and of the manner in which Jews were to wear phylacteries, or passages of Scripture written on parchment and tied round their heads. Even the length of fringe to be sewn on a garment, and the number of knots to be tied on each fringe, were made the matter of regulations which it was deemed impious to disobey. A whole treatise was devoted to the discussion of the question whether an egg laid on the Sabbath day might be eaten or not. Some said that it might not; to do so would be to break the Sabbath. Others said that it might be eaten, because, though it was laid on the Sabbath, it was *prepared* in the hen's body on the previous day. These last forbade the eating of an egg laid on the day *following* the Sabbath or any great feast, because it must have been *prepared* on the day of rest.

The effect of the teaching of the Pharisees had been to substitute forms for the worship of the heart, to deaden the feelings of love and devotion to God, and to create much hypocrisy. For it is certain that empty forms, in which the heart has no share, harden us instead of lifting us nearer to God. Isaiah and some of the other prophets had already referred to this danger among their countrymen, and had denounced it in very striking language. Take as examples the following: 'This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men.' And again: 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord. . . . Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with.' Again, Amos shows how a very strict observance of outward forms may exist along with utter disregard of truth and justice: he says that the Jews of his time said to each other, 'When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?' How hardening had been the effect of the frequent practice of empty forms is apparent from the cold condemnation with which the Pharisees witnessed some of our Lord's merciful cures, merely because they were performed on the Sabbath day.

Not only had the Pharisees made the ceremonial law of Moses most burdensome, and deadening to the religious feelings; they had also, under the cover of their traditions, introduced a number of very immoral precepts. For instance, the plain duty of a man to pay his debts was thus evaded: no Jew was to pay any debt to a heathen creditor within three days of a heathen festival. The command

of Deuteronomy to Israelites to 'love the stranger,' was directly contradicted by the Pharisaic precept that no Jewish nurse should attend to a heathen sufferer. The command 'Honour thy father and thy mother' was evaded, with the sanction of the Pharisees, by a pretended gift of all one's property to the Temple; in that case the man who had made the gift, or only uttered the word 'Corban,' a 'gift,' was entitled to refuse any support to his parents, whatever might be their need. It was to such immoral precepts as these that our Saviour alluded, when He charged the Pharisees with making the word of God of none effect through their traditions.

It, would, however, be doing injustice to the nobler spirits among the Pharisees to suppose that their teaching was all hard and formal or immoral. On the contrary, some very fine sayings of their chief teachers, or Rabbis, are left on record, which are in perfect harmony with the precepts of duty given by Christ. The following are some examples:—

Simon the Just said: 'Upon three things stands the world; upon law, upon worship, upon charity.'

Joses ben Jochanan said: 'Let thine house be open to the street; and the poor, the children of thine house.'

Antigonus of Socho said: 'Be not like servants, who serve their masters under promise of reward; but rather serve as those who ask for no wage, and let the fear of God be round about you.'

Rabbi Hillel said: 'What is hateful to thyself, do not to thy neighbour; this is the whole law, all the rest but commentary.'

'Judge not thy neighbour, till thou standest in his place.'

'Where is much righteousness, there also is much peace.'

'He is the true disciple of Aaron who seeks peace, loves men, and brings them to the Law.'

The following are from various sources:—

'Listen to reviling and answer it not; do all things for the love of God, and rejoice thyself in suffering.'

'Rank thyself with the oppressed rather than with the oppressors.'

'An evil eye, evil desire, and hatred of men, bring a man to destruction.'

'Surely the Law is the teacher of wisdom; make thine house into a meeting-place of the wise, sprinkle thyself with the dust from off their feet, and thirstily drink in their speech.'¹

When we compare the tone and temper of these sayings with the hard, self-righteous spirit which the majority of the Pharisees showed in the manner of their reception of Jesus, and with the

¹ This nobler side of Pharisaism is well brought out in the late Em. Deutsch's Essay on the Talmud, 'Literary Remains,' pp. 1-58.

examples previously given of their practical teaching, we cannot fail to be surprised at the contrast. It warns us that the nobler spirit of any Church may be completely stifled, if she allows herself to make all righteousness depend on the observance of external rites and ceremonies, without due regard to their original meaning, and to their influence on the spiritual life of her members.

Three other class names are used in the Gospels: a brief explanation of them will be here in place.

1. **SCRIBES.**—This name describes an office or occupation. The Scribes were generally Pharisees: their duty was to preserve the copies of the ancient Scriptures, and to make new copies as they were needed. The rules and regulations for copying the Scriptures were very minute, for some hidden meaning was supposed to be conveyed even by the number of letters, and by the manner of their arrangement in lines.

2. **LAWYERS.**—These also were Pharisees. They were the teaching body of the sect; it was their duty to learn by heart and to expound to the people the regulations and precepts referred to in the previous part of this lesson.

3. **HERODIANS.**—This is the name of a political rather than a religious party. The Herodians were, however, almost entirely composed of Sadducees, and bitterly hated the patriotic Pharisees. The Herodians, as their name implies, were adherents of Herod: they wished to see Judæa brought still more completely under the Roman rule, and tried to suppress any attempt made by the Jews to regain their independence. Herod was king, not by the choice of the Jews, but by appointment of the Roman Emperor; the only way that his power could be retained was by acting in subservience to Rome.

LESSON 152.

Read St. Luke i. 1—38.

THE first four verses of the passage just read are of great interest; they show us the plan followed by St. Luke in writing the Gospel which bears his name, and the purpose which he had before him in undertaking the task.

The plan adopted by St. Luke was to make strict enquiries from all those who were eye-witnesses of the events he records, in order that he might state nothing that could not be proved to be authentic. His next task was to arrange the materials thus collected after a method which he describes by the words 'in order.' As we proceed, we shall find good reasons for believing that by that expression, 'in order,' he did not mean chronological order, that is, order of time, but, rather, order of subjects. He constantly goes to the end of a series of events or subjects, to avoid returning to them again

after speaking of something else which may have occurred in the same period.

His purpose in writing the history of Christ's life was twofold : first, to prevent the reception of any false stories concerning our Saviour which may have become current in his time ;¹ second, the instruction of Theophilus, who seems from the title, 'most excellent,' prefixed to his name both here and at the beginning of the Acts, to have been a Gentile nobleman. The Gospel of St. Luke, however, though written primarily for one man, has constantly been regarded as the special Gospel for the Gentiles.

One remark may be made upon the last words of the preface, 'thou hast been instructed.' The Greek word so translated means 'taught by question and answer ;' it is really, with scarcely a letter changed, our word 'catechised.' This is interesting, as showing that in the very earliest times the Christian religion was taught in the same way as it is now, namely, by giving information to the learners, and then questioning them to find out whether they have understood what they have heard.

Of St. Luke's life not much is known. A few interesting facts may be gathered from the New Testament. He was one of the companions of the Apostle St. Paul in the journeys of the busiest part of his life ; and was sent by St. Paul on important missions to some of the Churches which he had founded. From the manner in which he is mentioned by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians, it is generally inferred that Luke was a Gentile, or at all events of Gentile (not Jewish) extraction. His profession was that of a physician ; St. Paul calls him 'the beloved physician : ' to his professional training is very probably due the accuracy with which he describes certain cases of sickness. The last notice of St. Luke in the New Testament is in St. Paul's last-written letter (the 2nd Epistle to Timothy), in which he says, 'Only Luke is with me.' St. Luke, therefore, may be regarded as a faithful friend of the great Apostle : he was with St. Paul in his work ; and, when his work was done, and he was waiting for death, danger could not drive St. Luke from his side.

The history recorded by St. Luke begins with an account of the prediction of the births of John (called afterwards John the Baptist) and of Jesus. This early commencement is, of course, in agreement with St. Luke's plan, which was to make enquiries 'from the very first.'

¹ Writings, known now as 'Apocryphal,' or doubtful 'Gospels,' were very early in circulation, in which the events recorded by our Evan-

gelists are almost concealed by a multitude of exaggerations and absurdities.

The announcement made to the good old priest *Zacharias*, that a son should be born to him and his wife *Elizabeth*, contained also a declaration of the work which that son should perform. He was to 'go before' the Lord 'in the spirit and power of *Elias* (*Elijah*),¹ to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' The announcement was more than *Zacharias* could believe, but the angel who made it departed with these last words: 'My words shall be fulfilled in their season.'

The following verses contain the account of another more wonderful announcement. An angel appeared to a virgin named *Mary*, and told her that she should have a son, whom she should call *Jesus*, and in whom the old promises of an everlasting kingdom should be fulfilled. The angel said unto *Mary*, 'The Holy Ghost (*Spirit*) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.' One thing only remains to be noticed, namely, *Mary's* faith and humility: when she heard these words of the angel, she said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.'

LESSON 153.

Read St. Luke i. 39—80.

THE narrative contained in the latter part of the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel is so plain and simple that it needs no explanation. But it contains two hymns, or songs of praise, which should be considered more minutely. These hymns, composed and sung or recited by *Mary* and *Zacharias*, have long been used in public worship by the greater part of the Christian Church, and are nearly always known by the first words of their Latin translations. The song of the Virgin *Mary* is known as the '*Magnificat*' (doth magnify or extol), that of *Zacharias* is known as the '*Benedictus*' (blessed).

The *Magnificat* is, like the Psalms which we have read in the Old Testament, mainly an expansion of one thought, and the thought is, the goodness of God to the meek and lowly. Such expressions as, 'He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden,' 'He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted them of low degree,' resemble many passages in the Psalms, of which one should be noticed more particularly, namely, the last verse of the fortieth Psalm: 'I am poor and needy, but the Lord

¹ Where personages of the Old Testament are referred to in the New by their *Greek* names, it is im-

portant that the attention of the scholars should be called to the fact, as above.

careth for me.' The New Testament, however, gives the clearest utterance of the same truth, especially in our Saviour's words, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;' 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'

The 'Benedictus' is full of the thought of God's blessing bestowed upon His chosen people, and through them upon other nations. It teaches us a great deal about the feeling of the Jews with respect to the expected Messiah. Zacharias speaks of deliverance of the Israelites from their enemies: twice, as we see, he refers to this matter. The deliverance was to come by some member of the house of David, the royal house of Judah: 'that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;' and again the result is described: 'that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him (God) without fear.' Still, in Zacharias's mind, as in that of the best of the Jews, there was something more in the expectation of the Messiah than the hope for mere outward freedom and deliverance from such external enemies as the Romans. The son, over whose birth he was rejoicing, was to be the herald of spiritual as well as of temporal blessings; he was to be the prophet of the Highest, 'to give knowledge of salvation unto His people, by the remission of their sins.' That must mean that the evils which were weakening the spiritual life of the Jews were to be put an end to. And Zacharias, in the true spirit of prophecy, takes a still wider view, for he declares that the great blessings which he foresaw were not to be confined to Jews only, but were to be extended to those who had not been instructed in God's ways as the Jews had. In fact, nothing less than this can be meant by the words 'To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Besides the above, there are three minor points of some interest. The account of the naming of the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth is the first hint we have that the name was given to a Jewish child at the time of his circumcision, just as with us a child receives his name at his baptism. We see also, that so long ago as the period of which we are reading it was customary to give a child the name of his father, or at all events of some member of the same family.

Next, what was the writing-table for which Zacharias called? It was not a table in our sense of the word, but a tablet, a small piece of wood or ivory covered with a thin coating of wax, in which the letters were scratched with the point of an iron instrument, called a style. When the writing had served its purpose, the instrument was turned, and its handle was used to rub the wax smooth, and leave the tablet ready for use again.

Third, St. Luke's mention, in the last verse of the chapter, of

the youth and early manhood of John is an illustration of what was said in the last lesson as to the meaning of the words 'in order.' John's remaining in the deserts (or wilderness) was certainly after the events which we shall find recorded in the next chapter; but St. Luke had nothing to tell us about him until the time of his showing unto Israel, except the one fact that he did remain in the deserts: it was therefore 'in order' that he should finish what he had to say about John, before going on to another subject.

LESSON 154.

Read St. Luke ii. 1—39.

THE passage presents very few difficulties of interpretation. There are, however, one or two detached words which need some explanation and a few verses which are important if we desire to understand the condition of the Jews with regard to their religious hopes and expectations at the time of our Saviour's birth. Some separate notes on these points, instead of a continuous comment, will now follow.

1. What was the taxing referred to in the early verses of the chapter? It was not a demand for money: if it had been, Joseph and Mary could have paid their money just as well at Nazareth as at Bethlehem. The word which is translated, 'taxing,' means literally 'writing down,' or 'enrolment,' and the thing signified seems to have been very much like what we now call a 'census.' The Roman Emperor wished to know the number of the inhabitants of Palestine, and the property which each possessed. The knowledge thus gained would certainly be very useful in case of taxation, that is, of raising money for the government, but raising money was not the only purpose of it. There is little doubt that one purpose was a political one. Palestine, under Herod, was a partially independent kingdom: the action of Augustus, in including this tributary state in the statistical records of the Empire, must have reminded Herod and the Jews that their independence was merely nominal, and that Augustus could, at any moment he chose, extend his own direct government over them. It is important to observe that the Jews had a very strong attachment to the homes of their remote ancestors; they might have been living for many generations in a distant place, but still they looked upon the homes of their ancestors as their own homes. It was just as if a man living in Yorkshire should call himself and believe himself to be a Londoner, merely because his great-grandfather, or some ancestor even more remote, had been a citizen of London. So when the decree was published for the enrolment of the Jews, they went to the old homes of their families, that they might be

written down or enrolled as belonging to those places. Joseph and Mary were of the family of David; their home, therefore, according to their view, was Bethlehem, though they lived at Nazareth; and accordingly they went to Bethlehem, to be enrolled there.

2. There were, doubtless, in different parts of Palestine, many others who were descended from David, and all of them being desirous of being enrolled at Bethlehem, the little town would be overcrowded. The only place for the reception of travellers was 'the inn,' which was not like our inns, a place where, in return for a payment of money, beds and food are provided; it was merely a building with several rooms, quite without furniture, but open, free of charge, to all comers. They had to take their food and bedding with them, and from the inn they got only shelter from the wind and rain. Places of the same kind are still found in some Eastern countries, where they are known by the name of Khans. When Joseph and Mary arrived, all the rooms were occupied, and therefore they had to seek for shelter in the shed set apart for the cattle. There our Saviour was born, in poverty and lowliness.

3. The words 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart,' give us the same idea of her character as that which we gathered from the first chapter, namely, that of a woman humble, meek, and faithful. There were strange events transpiring round her, in some of which she was an actor; she could not understand them, but kept thinking of them, in faith that some day she would receive an explanation.

4. The narrative of the words and deeds of the aged Simeon and Anna tells us that the expectation of a deliverer, which we have seen was cherished by the old priest Zacharias, was common to many of the Jews. They were glad to know that the fulfilment of God's promises was already begun, and spoke of their gladness 'to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.'

5. St. Luke's narrative of the birth and infancy of our Saviour is very full and seems to be complete. But from St. Matthew's Gospel we find, that between the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the return of His parents to Nazareth, some events occurred which St. Luke does not relate. Some wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, and said that they had seen a star which betokened the birth of a king of the Jews. They asked, therefore, where the young king was. The news of their arrival and their questioning was brought to Herod, the king of the Jews, and he, with his usual cunning, tried to avail himself of the services of the wise men to find out and destroy a possible rival. The wise men found Jesus at Bethlehem, but did not return to tell

Herod, for they had been warned of God that Herod wished to kill Jesus. Herod was angry at finding his plan foiled, and determined to perform a terrible act which, he thought, could not fail to accomplish what he desired, namely, the destruction of Him whom the wise men called 'King of the Jews.' He gave orders for the murder of all the young boys in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood. His orders were obeyed; all the young boys were slain; but his plan did not succeed. Joseph and Mary had been warned of Herod's design, and had fled into Egypt, taking the infant Jesus with them. There they remained until Herod's death, which happened not long after these events, and then they returned from Egypt, not to Bethlehem, but to their own city, or rather village, Nazareth.

LESSON 155.

Read St. Luke ii. 40—52.

THE short passage of the Gospel which we have just read is, for two reasons, very full of interest. It is the only account that we possess of any part of the life of our Lord between His infancy and the commencement of His public ministry, which was when He was about 30 years old. Besides which, it shows us much of His character, and proves that His youth was such as to lead to the life of manhood which is afterwards more fully described.

From the writings of Jewish Doctors, and of others who have studied the manners of the old Jews, we find that they had a peculiar form or religious rite which they used for admitting their boys into the congregation of Israel. Up to the age of twelve years, a boy was entirely under the control of his parents, and received from them all the instruction, both secular and religious, which he did receive. But at that age he was considered able to exercise his own powers of thought, and to understand for himself something of his duties as a member of the nation. He was taken to the priest, who caused him to read a short passage from the Law of Moses, which contained a confession of faith in the One True God. The priest, placing his hands on the boy's head, then uttered some prayers, and told him that from that day he was bound, on his own behalf, to obey the Law. From that time the Jewish boy had a new name, 'Son of the Law,' and was allowed to listen to the explanations of the Law which were given in all the principal towns of the country, and especially in Jerusalem, by the Doctors, or, as they were called, the Rabbis.

This ceremony, it appears, was performed in the case of Jesus; and He at once availed Himself of the privileges which it bestowed. His desire to know more of the Law of God led Him at once to

the place where the Doctors were explaining the Law. In listening to them and asking them questions, He forgot about the return of His friends to Nazareth, and was left behind in Jerusalem.

But we must now direct especial attention to that part of His character which is displayed in His conduct when, after their three days of grief and anxiety, His mother and Joseph found Him. His mother spoke words of tender reproach, to which He made reply in words which show that He must, even at that early age, have understood something of the greatness and divineness of the work He was to do: 'How is it,' He asked them, 'that ye sought me? wist¹ ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' But although some great thought thus filled the mind of Jesus, He did not show the least symptom of pride or self-will. On the contrary, we are told that He went with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. His bodily and mental growth are described in the simple words: 'Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'

What was the nature of His life for the next eighteen years at Nazareth we do not certainly know, but from a passage in St. Mark (vi. 3), 'Is not this the carpenter?' we may infer that it was a life of poverty and toil. The carpenter of a small village like Nazareth cannot have been a man of wealth, and must have had to work hard for his daily bread. In these days, when 'getting on' means 'getting rich,' and when too many people seem to fancy that manual labour is less honourable than other kinds of work, it is well to remember that our Saviour Himself spent His early manhood as a poor carpenter in a secluded Galilean village. There He waited in patience, until the time was come for the beginning of His public life.

LESSON 156.

Read St. Luke iii. 1—20.

IN this chapter we take up again the history of John, the son of Zacharias, at the point where it was left at the end of the first chapter. This chapter tells us how John was 'shown unto Israel.' Remembering the state of religious feeling among the Jews, and their expectation of the Messiah at that time, we shall not have much difficulty in understanding why the preaching of John, which was chiefly about the kingdom of God, attracted so large a number of hearers, and caused so much excitement and questioning. We are told by St. Luke (verse 15) that 'the people were in expectation,

¹ The obsolete word 'wist,' should be explained as meaning 'knew'; the connection between it and the words 'wit' and 'wise' should be

hinted at; and the form 'to wit' used in legal documents brought forward as a similar survival of an old English word.

and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ (the Messiah), or not.'

In this lesson we have to consider two things: (i.) the manner and matter of John's preaching; and (ii.) the ordinance of baptism which he adopted, and from which he has received the name of John the Baptist.

I. The description of John's preaching is given in words closely resembling those which are used with reference to the old prophets: 'the word of God came unto' him. He was a messenger sent to declare God's will; not merely to tell the people what he himself thought and felt. The carelessness of one part of the Jewish nation, and the formalism of another part, made him stern and unyielding in the delivery of his message. Like most earnest men, who feel the importance of the work they have to do, John had no time or inclination to please the multitudes who came flocking to him. He even chose words which must have displeased many of them, with the purpose of awakening them to understand the meaning of his message. He told all who heard him that the mere fact of their descent from Abraham was of no avail, if they put it forward as a plea for exemption from obedience to God's laws. Being Abraham's descendants would only make their case worse, unless they imitated Abraham's faith and obedience. But he added to this teaching practical advice, which it was within the power of all his hearers to obey. Upon the rich he enjoined almsgiving, upon the publicans justice, upon the soldiers moderation and contentment. And when the people wondered whether he were the Messiah, he told them that he was not, but that he was preparing the way for the Messiah's coming. In other words, John declared that if the Jewish people did not attend to the plain, practical duties which too many of them were neglecting, they would be unable to recognise the Messiah when He did come.

II. The ceremony of baptism, which has been continued to the present time by Christians, was not a new ceremony in the time of John, but he first used it as the form of admission into a distinct society; he made it the distinguishing mark of his disciples or followers. A brief account of its previous history and its meaning will be interesting and instructive.¹

Among the ancient Israelites, and also among many heathen nations of the ancient world, frequent washings of the body were in general use as part of the rites of their religion. The word 'baptism' is a Greek word, and its literal translation into English is 'washing.' The washing of the body was intended and under-

¹ The materials for this sketch are taken almost entirely from the article 'Baptism,' in the Dictionary

of the Bible. The author of the article is Dr. Harold Browne, the present Bishop of Winchester.

stood to be a symbol or sign of the purity of the hearts and intentions of the worshippers.

Long before the time when John came baptising in the Jordan, complete immersion in pure water had been used as a part of the ceremony by which both men and women, born in heathenism, were admitted into the commonwealth of Israel.

These customs would in a great measure have prepared the Jews for John's baptism. They were expecting the coming of the Messiah, who should deliver them from the afflictions which their sins had brought upon them. They readily coupled in their minds the necessity of repentance and the expectation of the Messiah, according to a very prevalent belief that the sins of Israel delayed the coming of Christ, and that their repentance would hasten it, John's baptism, corresponding with the custom of cleansing by water from legal impurity, and with the baptism of proselytes from heathenism to Judaism, seemed to call upon them to come out from the sinful and unbelieving habits of their age, and to enlist themselves into the company of those who were preparing for the manifestation of the deliverance of Israel. But it was distinct from those older customs in two points: it was practised, not in the case of heathens, but of Israelites, and so was distinguished from the baptism of proselytes; it was to be the beginning of a new life, and not merely the preparation for one definite act of religion, and by this it was distinguished from the 'washings' required by the ceremonial law of Israel.

The meaning of the sign was, purification. The connection between the sign and the thing signified is expressed very beautifully in the following passage from a sermon by the late Rev. F. W. Robertson: 'Ablution in the East is almost a religious duty; the dust and heat weigh upon the spirits and heart like a load: the removal is refreshment and happiness. And it was impossible to see that significant act—in which the convert went down into the water, travel-worn and soiled with dust, disappeared for one moment, and then emerged pure and fresh—without feeling that the symbol answered to and interpreted a strong craving of the human heart. It is the desire to wash away that which is past and evil.'

LESSON 157.

Read St. Luke iii. 21, 22; iv. 1—13.

[The teacher will exercise his own discretion as to omitting the genealogy. In the author's opinion any instruction that children might derive from reading it, is almost neutralised by the fact that in the translation of the Hebrew names into Greek, their forms are altered very greatly.]

IN this lesson we have put together parts of two chapters, because the history they contain is evidently continuous. The words 'Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost' certainly refer back to the middle of the previous chapter, where we read that 'The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased."'

The last words seem to mean that, at His baptism, Jesus received both the full knowledge of the work He was henceforth to be engaged in, and power to carry out that work. Immediately after this, He had to undergo that trial which is always known as His temptation in the wilderness. The close connexion between the baptism and the temptation of our Saviour is further shown by the fact that the tempter began two of his attempts with the words 'If Thou be the Son of God.' In that trial the devil tempted Jesus to make a bad use of the powers and gifts which God had bestowed upon Him. God had sent Jesus to redeem the world, to deliver mankind from their sins; He had given Him the power of working miracles, to aid Him in the accomplishment of His great work; and had just borne the witness, 'Thou art My beloved Son.' Then the devil came and proposed that Jesus should use those great powers for unworthy ends, for ends which, if attained, could benefit only Himself. Among other proposals was, as we have seen, the suggestion that these supernatural powers should be used to secure a great earthly kingdom with all its fame and power. It was needful that Jesus should be thus really and truly tempted, in order that His life and His victory over temptation might be an example to us. Had He not been tempted as we are, the history of His life would not have taught us how to live. One of the Epistles (Hebrews iv. 15) makes it a great encouragement to us, in our endeavours to live a godly life, that 'we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' The last words of this verse, 'without sin,' lead us to consider how Christ met the temptations of the devil; for it is in this that we must learn to follow His example. Take the second temptation. The tempter's words were no sooner ended than Jesus said, 'Get thee behind Me.' He cast back to the devil instantly the bad thoughts which he had suggested; He did not stay to play or trifle with them, but swept them away, as we should sweep away a poisonous insect which had dropped upon our hands, lest, if it were allowed to rest there even for a moment, it might leave its deadly sting behind. Now this is the only way in which we can resist temptation. We must always do what we know to be right, *at once*, without hesitation, without allowing ourselves to cast longing, linger-

ing glances on the wrong path. If we allow bad thoughts to find a home in our minds for even the shortest time, we shall have indeed a hard task to drive them out. They will cling to us more closely every moment that we cherish them in our souls, until at last they will gain the mastery over us, and lead us hopelessly degraded into bad and wicked deeds. If once we begin to play or trifle with a wicked thought, even if it does not then and there lead us into evil ways, it more or less weakens our sense of right and wrong, and the mere harbouring it, apart from any further consequences, is in itself a sin. This truth, though plainly stated over and over again in the Bible, is seldom sufficiently taken to heart. Men, in their judgments of their fellow-men, necessarily consider *actions* so exclusively that we are apt to forget that God knows and weighs our *thoughts*, and that He disapproves of wicked thoughts, even if they be not carried into action. In few words: watchfulness over our thoughts, and a strict control upon them, are the first necessities of a virtuous life. Hence the saying of our Lord: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' In these few simple words, which we should try to make the ruling maxim of our lives, we are taught what is the true and only foundation alike of religion and morality.

NOTE.—This is the only lesson in which I have dwelt at length on the government of the thoughts, but in several places I have alluded to it in passing. Let me entreat the teacher to amplify and dwell upon those passing references, and in fact to take every suitable occasion for impressing on his scholars the paramount and vital importance of keeping a strict and ever-watchful guard over our thoughts.

LESSON 158.

Read St. Luke iv. 14—44.

In this passage we have an account of the beginning of the public life of our Saviour. The first incident recorded at any length is His delivering an address in the synagogue of the village of Nazareth, where He had spent His youth, and His rejection by the Nazarenes. From that we shall presently draw a very important lesson, but we will previously consider two other points which demand some notice.

1. In the second verse of the passage we find, for the first time in our readings, the word 'synagogue.' What was a synagogue? and what can we learn about the rules for its government?

The history and origin of the synagogue is involved in some obscurity, but it is probable that the services of the synagogue, as they existed in our Saviour's time, do not date back to an earlier

period than the captivity in Babylon. The pious Jews there, being far away from Jerusalem, and therefore unable to attend the national services in the Temple, had been accustomed to meet together in other buildings for common worship, and after the return of the people to Palestine, this custom was continued in the various provinces of their own land. Places for common worship were built throughout the towns of Palestine, and were so multiplied, that at the commencement of our Lord's public ministry, no town or village in Palestine was without one such place, and many towns had two or three. In foreign countries also similar places were built. The Jews were scattered over great part of Western Asia, Eastern Europe, and Northern Africa; wherever they went, after the Captivity, they took this custom of regular meetings in stated places as part of their religious system. The name 'synagogue' is the Greek name of such a building, and, meaning either a 'meeting' or a 'place of meeting,' according to circumstances, expresses very correctly the purpose for which the building was used. Common worship was held in the synagogue every week, and so those who lived at a distance from the Temple in Jerusalem were constantly reminded of their duty towards God, and of their dependence upon Him. The manner of the worship that was conducted in these synagogues has been a subject of much controversy, but all who have studied it seem to agree in the most important particulars. (i.) Stated lessons were read from the Law and from the Prophets; and, since these books were written in the old Hebrew, they were translated for the benefit of the people into the common language, that is to say, Aramaic in Palestine, Greek in Gentile countries. (ii.) Prayers were offered to God by a minister in the name of all the people, who showed their agreement in the petitions by uttering aloud at the end of each prayer the word 'amen,' meaning 'truth,' as if they had said 'these are in truth our desires.' (iii.) The lessons read from the Law and the Prophets were often made the foundation for sermons or addresses to the people assembled in the synagogue. In Gentile countries Gentiles were admitted, and were often brought to the knowledge of the true God by the sermons they heard. It was such an address that our Lord gave in the synagogue at Nazareth.

2. The second point is that the latter part of the passage we have read contains the first accounts of any miracles performed by our Saviour. They are miracles of healing, signs of His love and goodness. Our last lesson showed that He would not use for Himself, for His own gain or advantage, the miraculous powers which He possessed, but now we find that as soon as He met with men suffering from bodily or mental disease, He put forth His power and restored them to health. We shall read afterwards of the

actual suffering to which He exposed Himself for the good of mankind; but surely we may already learn to love Him for His divine unselfishness, His care and love for the sad and suffering, to whom He 'went about doing good.'

3. But now let us compare this divine unselfishness of Jesus with the mean and narrow jealousy of the Nazarenes, who refused to hear Him, and, if they could, would have killed Him. In previous lessons we have seen some of the effects of this vice of jealousy. We have seen how it prompted the first deed of blood, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. We have seen how it led Joseph's brethren to do what was almost, if not quite, as wicked, that is, to sell their brother into slavery. In both these cases we have seen jealousy not only prompting cruel actions, but smothering all the natural affections of the men who were poisoned by it. In the passage just read we have an example of the *blinding* power of jealousy: we see how completely it closes people's eyes to the wisdom and virtues of their fellow-men. If this passion once takes firm hold of a person, it too often blinds alike his conscience and his reason. It blinds the conscience, so that the person who is subject to it ceases to distinguish right from wrong; and it often blinds the reason so completely as to make him not only unjust, but unable to discern even his own true interests. This was the effect of jealousy upon the people of Nazareth. They could see no beauty, no truth, no wisdom, in even our Saviour's 'gracious words,' because they had first known Him as only a poor carpenter's son, and because He had done deeds of love and mercy to others before coming to them. Had He come directly to them when He felt His time was come to begin His words and deeds of love, and had He come to them as the son of some great prince, or as a master in Israel, they might, perhaps, have listened to Him. But they could not bear to be taught or rebuked never so gently by One sprung from a family of their own village, by One who had lived in their midst as one of themselves. Therefore 'they were filled with wrath,' and would have killed Him.

Now this kind of thing is to be seen almost daily. Again, therefore, let it be remarked that jealousy takes many forms. It creeps stealthily into the hearts of young and old alike, if they be not watchful; it may lead to any kind of sin, according to the circumstances in which the person is placed who becomes its prey. But whatever may be the particular crime or folly into which it may draw us, its worst spiritual effect is always the same; it darkens our souls, and separates us from God.

LESSON 159.

Read St. Luke v. 1—16.

IN this passage we read of two of our Lord's miracles, and of the effect which one of them produced upon three men, Peter, James, and John, who at once became His disciples. Both these miracles, like almost all the others which He performed, were not merely wonders of a kind to astonish the spectators, but also proofs of His ready and broad sympathy with His fellow-men. They were of such a nature as to associate His teaching with His love, and to open men's hearts for the reception of the Gospel.

Let us to-day consider the effect which the great draught of fishes, following, as it did, immediately upon our Lord's teaching, produced on St. Peter. He appears to have been painfully dazzled by the full display of our Saviour's power and *purity*, just as a person is dazzled who comes suddenly out of a dark room into the bright sunshine of day. His first impulse was, as it were, to close his eyes. The awakened sense of his past short-comings, in the presence of the Saviour's holiness, pained and alarmed him. He exclaimed, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' But, as soon as Christ set before him the idea of becoming a fellow-labourer with Him, St. Peter's feelings took another turn. He found relief from the pressure of past sin, by taking up a life of exertion and self-denial. This was true, healthy penitence.

Now it is well that we should study carefully this story of what is generally known as the *call* of St. Peter, because it suggests to us, by contrast, other and very different kinds of so-called penitence, with which we may too easily content ourselves. There is a kind of sickly penitence which spends itself in idle, vain regrets for the past, and leads to no change of life. It is too common to find persons who seem to think that they can atone for a continuance in present transgressions by expressing great sorrow for past offences; to hear men, for instance, bewailing a mis-spent, wasted boyhood, without for a moment considering how they may best make use of the opportunities still left to them. Let us not try to shut our eyes to the truth in this matter. Idle regrets for the past, which bear no fruit in the future, are, too often, simply a means of deadening, and in time of destroying, the power of conscience. The test of healthy, life-giving repentance is whether it inspires us with such a loathing for our past sins as to make it more and more improbable that we shall ever repeat them. Penitence is a mere hollow and dangerous delusion, if it does not leave us with a deepened sense of how displeasing our faults are to God; if it does not thus strengthen us to resist future temptation.

Our repentances are vain, if they only make sin more easy and familiar to us, and if our consciences give us less and less pain with every repetition of their warnings. In a word, the soundness of penitence, like that of all other feelings, must be tested by its fruits; and though this truth seems so plain as to make its formal statement needless, there are, unhappily, few truths which men are so apt to overlook. It is, therefore, well that the example of St. Peter's conduct at his call, taken in connection with the grand story of his subsequent life, should be carefully meditated on. He did not, indeed, after his call, become by any means a faultless man. Far from it; he was guilty of many shortcomings, and of one very sad sin. But what did happen was, that, from the time of his awakening to a new life, *he grew steadily and continuously in faith, virtue, and courage, until, having conquered his natural timidity, he became, as we shall see in the Acts, one of the most self-sacrificing, fearless, and devoted of Christ's followers.* His was, therefore, the godly repentance spoken of by St. Paul, 'which needeth not to be repented of.'

In order the better to realise the great change made in St. Peter's feelings, let us contrast the exclamation we have just read, 'Depart from me,' with his words, spoken at a much later time, at a time when Jesus was deserted by many of His professed disciples. On that occasion, He asked those nearest to Him, 'Will ye also go away?' and St. Peter, answering for them, said, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

Another point of great importance is, the statement made in the last verse of the passage we have just read: Jesus 'withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed.' Such actions as those of which to-day's lesson tells us—teaching great multitudes of people, and healing them of their infirmities—must not only have caused fatigue to our Saviour's body, but must also have been a strain upon His spirit. How did He maintain His spiritual strength? *By prayer to God*; by retiring into a solitary place, and refreshing and strengthening His spirit in communion with His Father.

These private prayers of Jesus are very frequently mentioned in the Gospels, and especially by St. Luke. The lesson we should learn from them is very plain. All of us are exposed to trials and temptations, all are subject to suffering of many kinds. In such circumstances we need spiritual strength, support, and comfort, and the surest way of obtaining them is to seek them, as our Lord did, by frequent, earnest prayer, and in quiet communion with God.

LESSON 160.

Read St. Luke v. 17-39.

THIS passage commences with an account of a miracle of healing performed by our Lord, goes on to describe the calling of Levi—better known by his other name, Matthew—to be a disciple of Christ, and concludes with an abstract of our Saviour's teaching on the relation between His own work and that of John the Baptist and the Pharisees.

Our first object here is to explain the meaning of the word 'publican,' and the reasons why publicans were so much disliked by the Pharisees, that is, by the great body of the religious Jews.

At the time of which we are reading, Palestine was a province of the Roman empire, and the Jews were obliged to contribute their share towards the expenses of government. The money was principally raised by taxes levied upon certain articles of daily use, by charges upon sales of fish or farm-produce, and by tolls. These taxes were not collected, as taxes in England are now, by persons appointed by the central government, but in a very different way. The emperor, or the manager of his finances, let out the privilege of collecting particular taxes to the highest bidder. For instance, if a tax had been imposed for a certain time upon the hay grown in some specified district, a rough estimate would be made of the amount of money likely to be received, and, instead of waiting for the money to be paid in small sums, the government agreed with a wealthy man who was willing and able to pay a large sum of money down, and gave him, in return, authority to collect the tax from the people, in any way that seemed best to him. This rich man usually employed a number of persons to do the collecting for him, and very generally pressed the people so hard for payment that, besides repaying himself the large sum he advanced, he made a considerable fortune. The actual collectors of the taxes are, in the New Testament, called 'publicans.'

Since it was the interest of the publican to get as much money as he could out of the people, for his wages were generally in proportion to the money he paid to his employer, it very often happened that the publican was not exactly fair in his dealings with the people; so unfairness was always suspected, even where it did not exist, and throughout the Roman empire no class of men were so much disliked as these publicans.

But in Palestine they were more disliked than elsewhere. The Jews, and especially the Pharisees, who cared most for the remembrance of their former independence, hated the Romans in-

tensely as their heathen conquerors, and that hatred was made even more intense by the necessity of their paying taxes to the Roman government. Many Pharisees declared that it was an unlawful act for a Jew to pay any tribute to a heathen. And when Jews were found, who were not merely willing to pay, but to be the active instruments in collecting the taxes, the hatred of the Pharisees rose almost to fury. They looked upon Jewish publicans as worse than heathens, and classed them always with the worst kind of sinners. Their hatred for the publicans had its natural result; as a class the publicans were degraded: they had forfeited the respect of the best of their fellow-countrymen, and soon lost their own self-respect.

Now let us observe that these people, who were so much despised by their fellow-men, were not neglected, as incurably degraded, by our Lord. Their degradation seemed to give them a claim upon His care, and, therefore, instead of avoiding them, He mixed freely with them, and tried to awaken them to a desire for a better life. This was what He meant, when He answered the rebukes of the Pharisees by the words which we have read to-day, 'They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'

Levi, or Matthew, is an example of the success of our Saviour's plan of love. When he was called, he left his work of collecting the taxes, and left, of course, the gains which he would have made, and followed Jesus at once. He became a most faithful follower, and was the first to write down for the benefit of others an account of his Master's life. He was the author of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

Another word to be considered is the word 'parable.' This is only the English way of writing a Greek word which means 'resemblance' or 'comparison.' But it is used in the New Testament in a special sense. A great scholar, Dr. Lowth (1710-1787), gives this definition:—A parable is 'a continued narrative of a fictitious event, by way of simile to the illustration of some important truth.' It is added, that the circumstances, though fictitious, or made for the purpose, are always such as might have happened. We shall find examples of such parables as we proceed. Sometimes the word is used, as in the passage we have read, for a simple comparison, in which no event is described. The action of Christ's new teaching was *like* the action of new wine, whose fermentation always causes a disturbance of its mass, and stretches to the utmost the skin or leather bottles in which it is kept by Eastern people. To attempt to make Christ's teaching agree with all the forms and ceremonies which the Pharisees had invented, would be like putting new wine into leather bottles which had already been

strained as far as possible: in such a case the bottles would burst, and the wine would be lost. That is, interpreting the parable, the forms of the Pharisees would be destroyed with all the good as well as evil that was in them, and our Saviour's teaching would also come to nothing. 'But new wine,' He said, 'must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.'

LESSON 161.

Read St. Luke vi. 1-19.

THE greater part of the passage read to-day may reasonably be looked upon as an interpretation in action of the parable with which our last lesson closed. On two occasions, the excessive scrupulosity of the Pharisees with regard to certain forms of their Law, or rather, of their explanations and additions to the Law, brought Jesus into conflict with them. In one of the introductory lessons it was stated that the chief fault of the Pharisees was that they lost sight of the meaning of the Law, which was intended as a spiritual guide for men, in their desire to carry out its directions in a mechanical manner. This lesson shows us that fault in action.

In the first of the recorded instances, they accused the disciples of Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, because as they passed through the corn-fields they plucked a few of the ripe ears, and rubbed off the husks to eat the grains. This, we are told by scholars, was a recognised privilege of passers-by, and was provided for by law. But the Pharisees said it was working on the Sabbath. Our Lord answered by appealing to their common-sense: His disciples were hungry, and had a right to do so much work as was necessary to prepare the corn for eating.

The second case is more remarkable, and conveys a lesson which we must try to bear in mind. In the synagogue, where Scribes and Pharisees were gathered for worship on a Sabbath-day, there was a man whose arm was withered. Jesus came to that synagogue and taught. Now the Pharisees knew that He could heal men's infirmities, and therefore watched Him narrowly to see what He would do in this instance. He rebuked them, though in the most gentle words, and healed the man, thus rousing their anger even to madness.

Now what we must observe here is the deadening effect produced upon the souls of these Pharisees by their exclusive attention to outward forms. They were assembled for worship; that is, they came there to pray to God, to hear the Scriptures read and explained. But their thoughts were not at all employed in the worship; they were thinking only of a particular form, and lost

all the benefit of the prayers, of the reading, and of Christ's teaching. They were watching Him all the time, eager to accuse Him of breaking the Law. His defence of His disciples had prepared them to expect that He would do some deed which they would consider contrary to the Law. So, not only did they lose the spiritual benefit which they might have derived, but their human sympathies also were blunted. The pain which the poor afflicted man must have been suffering did not at all occur to them. And, all the while, they were forgetting the true meaning of the very form they wished to have observed. If they had considered what was the true meaning of the Sabbath—that is to say, that it was intended for man's rest and refreshment, both bodily and spiritual—they could not have blamed our Saviour for healing the afflicted man on the Sabbath-day, for they would have felt that the removal of suffering was one great element of rest.

We may notice, that immediately after this, St. Luke tells us again of our Saviour's private prayers. The conflict with the Pharisees had caused Him pain and weariness. In secret communion with God He regained peace and strength.

The closing verses tell us of the selection of twelve of the disciples, who were from that time known as 'Apostles.' They were 'sent out' (that is the meaning of the word *apostle*) from time to time, into the various towns of Palestine, to prepare the way for the personal visits of their Master. We may infer from this selection of a chosen few to be His special ministers, that the gracious words and deeds of our Saviour had produced a great effect upon the people, and that many of them became 'disciples' or 'learners.' With these twelve, He went to a place where a great multitude of people had gathered together, and addressed them in a discourse which has always been known as the 'Sermon on the Mount.'

LESSON 162.

Read St. Luke vi. 20—49.

THE discourse of our Lord to His disciples and the people who had collected to hear Him, which we have just read, is called, from the place of its delivery, the Sermon on the Mount. In St. Matthew's Gospel the same discourse is given at much greater length, filling there the 5th, 6th, and 7th Chapters. But St. Luke gives us in later chapters of His Gospel nearly all those parts which are omitted in the passage which we have just read. We will therefore, for to-day, confine our attention to this passage, and consider the other parts when we come to them.

This discourse is so full of important teaching, being indeed our Lord's first declaration of the principles of the religion and

morality which He came to teach, that we cannot examine the precise meaning of each sentence, but must content ourselves for the present with attempting to get a general idea of the teaching as a whole.

The first thing we must notice is that the Sermon on the Mount does not contain minute and detailed rules of conduct. Our Saviour does not tell us exactly what we are to do under such and such circumstances, but He declares what is the spirit which must actuate us in all our deeds. This, indeed, is what is meant by the statement that in the Sermon on the Mount we have a declaration of the principles of Christian religion and morality. Had it been otherwise—that is to say, had our Lord given us minute rules—His teaching would have been much less simple, much harder to be taken to heart by people of all ages and all conditions of life. But when we understand well that He is teaching us the general motives which should guide our conduct, we shall have no difficulty in applying His words in our daily lives. It is this declaration of principles rather than formal rules, which makes one great distinction between the manner of our Lord's teaching and that of the Pharisees. They gave very minute rules and directions for almost every conceivable case; and the result was that men thought so much of the forms of the rules, that they missed the spirit of the commands embodied in them. We have to ask ourselves whether the motives by which our actions are directed are such as Christ would approve; and so our thoughts, instead of always dwelling on ourselves, are turned to Him.

Now let us consider the various principles declared in this Sermon. Our Lord begins by pronouncing certain blessings, or 'beatitudes,' as they are usually called, which are really declarations of the true ground of happiness. The number of these blessings is greater in St. Matthew's Gospel than in St. Luke's, and among those which are omitted here, there are two which we must not pass over. They are, first, the sentence which has more than once been quoted in these lessons, viz., 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God;' and secondly, 'Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.' Of those which are given in the passage we have read to-day the teaching is very plain. We must learn not to set our affections on the things of this world, such as wealth, fame, or great favour with our fellow-men, but rather to desire God's approval. We are reminded of the old prophets, who were hated and persecuted, because they chose to please God rather than men; and we are told that their reward was great in heaven.

In the second part of the Sermon, our Lord instructs us

generally as to our duties towards our fellow-men, and tells us that we must treat each other in a generous, forbearing, self-denying spirit. We must love and do good to all, not merely to those who do good to us, but even to our enemies. So only can we be the children of the Highest, of our Father in heaven, 'for He' (to quote the fuller form of words from St. Matthew, chapter v. verse 45)—'He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'

Our Lord then goes on, in the third part of the Sermon, to show that the root and spring of all our actions is in our hearts, and that unless our desires and thoughts be pure, we cannot do good deeds. He uses a very striking illustration: 'A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.'

And then the Sermon concludes with a most solemn warning, expressed in the form of a parable about two builders, against empty professions which bear no fruit in a virtuous life. Throughout the Gospels such warnings occur. Over and over again, our Saviour warns us that it is an easy thing to say, 'Lord, Lord,' and to profess faith in Him, but that it is a hard and yet a needful thing to keep His precepts. To hear His words and do them is like living in a house which no storms can shake or floods wash away, because it is 'founded upon a rock.'

LESSON 163.

Read (again) St. Luke vi. 20—26.

THE last lesson directed our attention generally to the whole teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Let us now refer especially to the commencement of the sermon, and, above all, to two verses, the 22nd and 23rd. They run thus: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy, for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.' And the 26th verse completes the teaching on this point, by showing the opposite side: 'But woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you: for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'

These verses contain our Lord's own declaration of a truth stated in many other parts of the Bible, a truth which most men admit, but which, in practice, is very generally forgotten. They tell us that we ought not to expect praise from our fellow-men for all our good deeds. Now, although all Christians admit this truth, and confess that we should look to God, rather than to man, for our

reward, there are sayings very common among us which show how many of us forget it. For instance, how common it is to hear persons say that they have given up a good work, because they found it a 'thankless task,' as though that were a sufficient reason for abandoning a duty. This fault is not peculiar to any age. Even children at school are apt to be discouraged and to relax in their efforts, if their teachers and parents do not praise them when they do their lessons well. And, all through life, this feeling of making the praise of our fellow-men a condition on which alone we will do our duty is sadly too common. Its frequency is a proof how strangely blind we remain to all the earnest warnings of Scripture against it.

Now there is no surer way of guarding ourselves against this failing, than by thinking often of the noble examples of disinterested action with which the Bible and other histories furnish us. In all times some few great men have been found ready to go steadily on in the path of duty, in spite of all the discouragements which the persecution, the ingratitude, or the ignorance of their fellow-men could throw in their way. Indeed, it has been more often ignorance than ingratitude which has led men to make a bad return to their benefactors. Many of the greatest blessings bestowed on mankind could not be valued or appreciated by the men of the time when they were first made known. A child cannot be grateful to the teacher who is teaching it the alphabet, because it is only after it has learnt to read, and has experienced the pleasures to be enjoyed in reading, that it can value the knowledge it has acquired.

Take some other instances ; and, first, one from English History. In the 13th century there lived in England a man named Roger Bacon, who devoted his life and all his fortune to the study of what is called Natural Philosophy. He was, no doubt, the father of that Natural Science for which England is now so famous, and which has given us so many material advantages. But the men of his own day did not understand him ; they called his experiments conjuring, and tried him for witchcraft and heresy. The reward he received was many years of imprisonment, during which he was strictly prohibited from writing out the results of his long labours. Some historians, indeed, say that the harshness with which he was treated brought on an illness, of which he died in prison.

Another instance comes from the history of the Israelites. They were never grateful to Moses for his self-sacrifice, because they knew from experience all about the good things they had enjoyed and left in Egypt, and had no faith in the untasted blessings of the promised land.

Still another example may be found in St. Paul. Without his laborious journeys and unwearied preaching, Europe would not

have received the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ. Yet in him the prophecy of our Saviour was literally fulfilled; for he says of himself, and of those who journeyed with him, 'we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things.'

These persecutions, which not only St. Paul, but very many other teachers of Christianity, had to undergo in order to secure for mankind the blessings of the Gospel, are mentioned in the verses we have read to-day, in connection with similar persecutions endured by the old prophets in their exertions for the good of Israel. When, therefore, we read in the Bible, or in any other history, of such cases of ingratitude or persecution of benefactors, we should stop to consider in what a condition we should have been, had all those who have gone before us been unable or unwilling to do their duty, unless always stimulated or supported by the praise and gratitude of those whom they tried to benefit.

No doubt, well-earned praise is very pleasant, and undeserved blame very bitter. All persons of good feeling value the sympathy and approval of their fellows. It is when we allow ourselves to become wholly dependent upon them as our main support in the discharge of our duty that we do wrong. If we cannot walk a step without men's praise, and have a mean, cowardly dread of their blame, we cease to be the servants of God, and become the slaves of men. Our actions will be governed, not by our own will, but by the opinions of others; and we shall often be driven from the course our conscience approves by the influence of the most selfish, the most ignorant, and most stupid, of our fellow-men.

LESSON 164.

Read St. Luke vii.

THE acts and words of Jesus recorded in this chapter are of a kind which cannot fail to increase our love for His person and character. In the early part of the chapter we read of an act of healing performed on the servant of a centurion, that is, the commander of a division of the Roman army consisting of one hundred men. The kindness of this centurion towards the Jews in Capernaum, shown by his building a synagogue for their worship, and the gratitude of the Jews for his kindness, shown by the fact that it was the chief men of the Jews that asked Jesus to heal the centurion's servant, are very pleasing to notice. They show that *some* Romans, at all events, were considerate and thoughtful in their dealings towards the conquered Jews, and that the hatred of the Jews for the Roman yoke did not always imply hatred for individual Romans. The action of the centurion, however, proves that, although he had not united himself to the Jews, he had learnt so much of the True

God that he cannot be looked upon as a heathen. In any case we must notice that his faith drew forth praise from our Saviour, who said to the people: 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'

The second miracle recorded in this chapter is one of the most striking contained in the Gospel. In the former case, a man, sick unto death, but still alive, had been restored to health; but, in this case, a man already dead and on his way to burial was brought back to life. We cannot wonder that such a display of power made the people declare, 'A great prophet is risen up among us,' and 'God hath visited His people.' What we must notice, however, is not merely that this was an act of power, but that it was an act of power directed by pity and love. The words, 'Weep not,' addressed by Jesus in His compassion to the sorrowing mother, are as full of instruction for us as the words of power, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.'

The verses which follow, relating how John the Baptist, who was then in prison, sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus whether He really was the long-looked-for Messiah, present some difficulties. The interpretations that have been given fall into two classes. Some scholars believe that John the Baptist sent his disciples merely for their satisfaction, not for his own. Others again, making use of the likeness, frequently alluded to in the Gospels, between John and Elijah, believe, that just as Elijah's fortitude once deserted him, when Jezebel threatened to slay him, so John, now that he was in prison, and had been put there at the desire of a woman almost as wicked as Jezebel, felt his faith and courage deserting him, and sent these disciples to Jesus that they might bring back to him in his prison some comfort and solace.

The praise of John, uttered by our Lord after the departure of his messengers, aroused the anger and jealousy of some Pharisees who heard it. Their murmuring drew forth from Jesus words of keen rebuke. He said that they were as difficult to please as children: whatever was given them was just what they did not want. John's austerity displeased them, and the sociability of Jesus displeased them equally. Still, He concluded, 'Wisdom is justified of all her children;' meaning, it seems, that there is a right place both for austerity and for sociability.

The chapter concludes with a lesson of love, in the form of a parable. This parable was addressed to a Pharisee, whose rigid notions of what was right and proper were upset by the reception accorded by Jesus to a sinful woman. The Pharisee seems to have been almost untouched by the teaching of Jesus; but in the heart of the sinful woman His purity awoke a sense of past sin, and desire for amendment. She was in the house of a respectable Pharisee, where

she could not venture to come boldly forward and speak to Jesus, but she did what she could ; she crept quietly behind the couch on which He was lying, and let her penitential tears fall over His feet, which she then wiped with her long hair. Her sincere penitence was acknowledged by our Lord, and He comforted and strengthened her by the words: 'Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.'

LESSON 165.

Read St. Luke viii.

THE Parable of the Sower, which we have just read, taken with the interpretation which our Saviour gave of it to His disciples, is very easy to understand. It tells us of the many ways in which the Word of God is prevented from bearing its natural fruit in our hearts and conduct. To consider in detail all the dangers to our religious and moral welfare against which this Parable warns us, would indeed require many lessons, for there is no age or condition of man to which it does not apply. Some of its warnings are made the exclusive subjects of other Parables; for instance, the warning against the dangers arising from worldly cares, given in the 7th and 14th verses, is very strikingly set forth in the Parable of the Great Supper, which we shall hereafter consider. The verses to which we will confine our attention to-day are the 6th and 13th, which have a direct reference to self-control.

The 6th verse says of the seed, 'Some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.' Our Saviour interprets the verse thus: 'They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.'

Now these verses teach us that mere passing bursts of religious feeling will not support us in the paths of virtue. They apply, for instance, to people who listen with pleasure, and with a certain kind of religious feeling, to beautiful prayers and sermons, but whose good intentions vanish in the presence of severe temptations. Let us, then, consider how, by the aid of religion, we may establish in our characters steadfastness of purpose, or what is commonly called self-control, that is, the power of doing what we think right in spite of temptations. Beyond all doubt, this quality of self-control is most easily acquired in youth; indeed, if we grow up in self-indulgent ways, it is very hard ever to get out of them: our desires and impulses are strengthened by every victory they gain over our resolution, until at last they may entirely overcome our conscience. How often, for instance, does the unhappy drunkard

in his better moments really wish to become a sober man, and how often does he find that all power of self-control has been destroyed by long indulgence, so that his bad habits master all his good intentions! We cannot, therefore, begin too soon to practise self-control. We must remember that if our religious faith is to help us in the hour of temptation, we must carry it into our *daily* life and actions. We must strive early to accustom ourselves to think of God as *always* near us, loving and caring for us. If we do so think of Him, we shall find that it will become daily more and more easy for us to make His precepts the rule of our lives. If we once fully grasp the truth that God loves us and cares for us, we shall love Him in return, and obedience to His laws will then become a pleasure, rather than a burden to us. We all know how light our exertions become, when we make them to please those we love. So it is with people who love God with all their hearts. As St. Paul says, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.'

We should never forget that we have daily, almost hourly, opportunities of showing our love to God, and of exercising and thus strengthening our self-control. We all have small daily, as well as great occasional, temptations; and we may gain great strength by the daily watchfulness needful to resist our lesser temptations, as well as by resisting those greater ones which more rarely assail us. Our daily trials vary according to our natural dispositions or circumstances in life. Some of us are naturally inclined to be lazy or careless; and the exertion required for the careful and conscientious discharge of our daily duties is a wide field for the exercise of our self-control. Others are tempted to be cross and unkind, others to be very vain and conceited; in short, all of us have inclinations and thoughts which require to be constantly kept down and controlled; and it is by daily bringing them into subjection and obedience to Christ's precepts that we grow in faith and strength. Let us close these remarks on self-control with some lines in which this thought is very beautifully expressed:

'The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.'

The remainder of the chapter contains accounts of several of our Lord's miracles, performed for the relief of both mental and physical distress, and told in language so simple that it would be difficult by any comments to make its meaning clearer.¹

¹ The accounts of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac and of the destruction of the herd of swine, are, to some extent, an exception to this

His words, given in the 21st verse: 'My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it,' show clearly the *practical* character of His teaching, and impress a lesson which we have before noticed, namely, that mere words, without good deeds, are not acceptable to God.

NOTE.—The importance of forming habits of self-control in early life cannot be too earnestly impressed upon the young. The teacher should amplify the few instances given in this lesson of the various ways in which we may strengthen such habits by daily exercise of the self-denial needed to *correct our minor failings*. The wonderful anecdotes one reads of the self-restraint of North American Indians¹ under great danger and pain prove that self-control, when practised early in life, though it be practised solely under the exigencies of circumstances, acquires extraordinary strength. How much stronger, then, will it become, if practised daily in youth as a conscientious duty!

LESSON 166.

Read St. Luke ix. 1—22.

THE commencement of this passage describes the event which gave to the twelve chosen followers of Jesus the name of Apostles. That name, as has been already explained, means 'persons sent forth.' In sending out His Apostles, our Lord gave them some simple instructions, the general effect of which was that they should aid His work by the same means as He Himself was taking for furthering it. His forbidding them to make any great preparation for their journey had apparently two purposes: He desired to encourage them to trust in God's providence, and also wished them to proceed upon their errand without delay.

The wider spread of His fame which naturally resulted from this course, alarmed Herod the Tetrarch, who, subject always to a general allegiance to the Roman Emperor, then ruled in Northern Palestine. The 7th to the 9th verses give the reasons for Herod's anxiety, and refer very briefly to the beheading of John the Baptist. St. Luke's Gospel contains no particulars of this event; we will, therefore, take the full account from the Gospel of St. Mark (Mark vi. 17—29). There we read as follows:—

'Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and

description. I have, however, left them without comment, because I have not been able to find, and am unable to suggest, any explanation which is at once sufficiently full and

sufficiently simple for young persons.

¹ Instances and references of great interest are collected in the notes to Campbell's 'Gertrude of Wyoming.'

bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife : for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him ; but she could not : for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him ; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee ; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And he sware unto her, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." And she went forth, and said unto her mother, "What shall I ask ?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, "I will that thou give me by and by¹ in a charger the head of John the Baptist." And the king was exceeding sorry ; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought : and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel : and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

The extraordinary act of capricious cruelty and levity here recorded, horrible as it was, is only one of a multitude which might be cited to show the danger of entrusting absolute and despotic power to a being so weak and erring as man.²

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is so simply told, and its lesson is so obvious, that no comment is here needed. But it is not quite clear, from the passage which we have read, why Jesus went aside privately into a desert place. From the other Evangelists we may gather the following facts : that at the death of John the Baptist his disciples at once attached themselves to Jesus, and that it was immediately after they had joined Him, that He

¹ The phrase 'by-and-by' has completely changed its meaning since our authorised translation was made. It is now a phrase of *delay*, but in each of the four places where it occurs in the Authorised Version, this place included, it is used to translate Greek words which mean 'at once.'

² To Herod, more afraid of breaking a promise he never should have made than of incurring the guilt of murder, we may apply our own poet's lines :—

'His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.'

went away into the desert place. The cruel murder of so eminent a teacher as John had been, would certainly cause great grief to his disciples, and would give them some reason for anxiety about their own safety. The retirement would give them opportunity for indulging their grief, the counsel they received from Jesus privately would comfort their hearts, and strengthen them to face any danger that might be coming.

Immediately after the feeding of the multitudes, we read of our Saviour's praying secretly, as was His custom, and then of His announcing to His disciples, for the first time, that He would suffer the same fate as John: His death would be a violent death, but it would be followed by the glory of resurrection.

LESSON 167.

Read St. Luke ix. 23—36.

OUR Lord's prediction of His own death, which closed our last lesson, leads naturally to the teaching with which this passage begins. There He lays down once more the Christian doctrine of self-denial: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' The ground on which the doctrine rests is stated in very striking words, which our Saviour frequently repeated, in forms varying very slightly: 'For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and lose himself, or be cast away?' St. Mark (viii. 37) tells us that He added, 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'¹ In considering such a passage as this, we must remember a fact stated in the first of our lessons, namely, that in those early days, before the art of printing had been invented, all sayings intended for the people at large had to be put in such a short form that they could be easily remembered and quickly repeated. For such a purpose it was only possible to state truths in a broad, unqualified manner. There can be little doubt that it was with the object of their being more easily circulated and more generally understood, that Jesus expressed in what we may call proverbial sentences the most important of the truths He taught. Usually also, as in this instance, the broad, unqualified form of the saying carries it more directly home to us than if it had been very fully and lengthily explained. The passage which we are now considering is generally held to be a contrast between the eternal importance of our spiritual life and the fleeting character-

¹ Or 'life.' The same Greek word is translated 'life' in St. Luke and 'soul' in St. Mark.

of our earthly life. It tells us of the foolishness of sacrificing the life of our spirits, for the sake of any passing enjoyment in this earthly life. The same thought is beautifully expressed by St. Paul, in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, 'For which cause we faint not: for though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

But by far the most forcible comment on the meaning of the saying which we are considering is to be found in the account of our Lord's Transfiguration which immediately follows it, and which took place very soon after it was uttered. In that wonderful manifestation, the coming death of Christ upon the cross, which was the subject of his conversation with Moses and Elijah who appeared in glory, is brought into immediate association with His glorification, and with the renewed assurance direct from God, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him." The glory of self-sacrifice is thus set forth in the most striking manner.

It would be impossible for us to consider all the meaning which learned and pious men have seen in the Transfiguration, but, in conclusion, one effect which it must have produced may be pointed out. The three disciples, Peter, James, and John, who were selected to witness the Transfiguration, were the same who were destined to be Christ's companions in the agony which, as we shall read in a later chapter of this Gospel, He underwent in the garden of Gethsemane immediately before His trial and crucifixion. There can be no doubt that what they had seen and heard on the Mount must have helped to prepare them for the impending separation from their beloved Master. It must have been designed to prepare them to take in the truth, so hard for them to grasp, that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was a part of the great work of man's redemption.

One or two notes may be added on some of the circumstances of the Transfiguration.

1. Its place. Mount Tabor has all the authority which some centuries of tradition can give. But it has been proved conclusively that, at the time referred to, the top of Tabor was occupied by a fortress. Therefore it could not have been a fit scene for what was clearly a secret manifestation. Modern writers agree in assigning as the scene of the event, Hermon, the southern

extremity of the Lebanon range. This mountain, with its perpetual snow, would seem hinted at by St. Mark's words—'exceeding white, as snow.'

2. Its time. Our Lord's custom was to retire to the mountains *at night*. That He observed His usual practice on this occasion, seems evident from the 37th verse: 'on the next day, when they were come down from the hill.' This is worth noticing, because it removes to a great degree the reproach sometimes brought against the three disciples, that they 'were heavy with sleep,' while so remarkable an event was transpiring.

LESSON 168.

Read St. Luke ix. 37—62.

IN our last lesson we read of a heavenly revelation; we cannot fail to be struck with the contrast which the passage of Scripture now read presents to that scene of peaceful glory. The poor young man who was brought to Jesus was no common sufferer. The suffering, both of the youth and of his father, must have been intense, and was at once relieved.

After that our Lord repeated to the whole body of His disciples the warning He had given once before of His approaching death. He urged them to be earnest in their attention to His words, while they had the opportunity of hearing Him, for He was soon to be delivered into the hands of men.

The remainder of the chapter contains several important lessons taught by our Lord to His disciples, and describes the circumstances which gave occasion for them. We will take them one by one.

1. It is clear from many other parts of the New Testament, that the great majority of our Lord's followers were very long in understanding the nature of His kingdom. They acknowledged Him as the Messiah, but were very slow in disentangling that thought from the expectations which, before He called them, they had entertained in common with the bulk of their fellow-countrymen. Their confusion of the spiritual kingdom, which He taught, with the temporal kingdom, which they had expected, gave rise to discussions which of them should have the highest place in 'the kingdom of Heaven,' or, in St. Luke's words, 'which of them should be greatest.' Jesus settled their dispute, by telling them that the distinctions of which they were thinking, did not exist in His kingdom. The highest place should be given, not to him who wished to have authority over his brethren, but to him who was most willing to be the least and lowest of all. The words are best interpreted by a passage from St. Matthew, 'Blessed are the

poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.' His teaching on this point was enforced, as on some other occasions, by the example of a little child.

2. The next lesson is on the evils of a spirit of narrowness in religion. It seems that some persons heard and believed in Jesus, who yet did not follow Him in the same way as His attached disciples did. John wished to prevent all such persons from laying claim to any connexion with his Master. But Jesus answered, 'He that is not against us is for us.' These are words which have too often been forgotten. Men, calling themselves Christians, have refused to acknowledge the possibility of love for Christ and belief in Him showing itself in any way but that which they practise, and so they have often done grievous harm to the cause of truth and goodness. But our Lord's words prove that there are many ways of showing faith and love, and that none of these are rejected or forbidden by Him.

3. The next lesson is, if possible, still more important. The mutual hatred of Jews and Samaritans caused the inhabitants of a Samaritan village to refuse hospitality to our Lord and His disciples, 'because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem.' Two of our Lord's disciples, with their minds full of the scene they had lately witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration, but thinking less of its meaning than of the fact that Elijah had appeared there, proposed that one of the sternest of Elijah's acts should be repeated or imitated; that fire should be called down from heaven to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans. Our Lord rebuked them immediately, and told them that the spirit displayed by their proposal was contrary to the spirit of love which actuated Him in His ministry. He was not come to destroy but to save. The lesson is, perhaps, as necessary now as it was then. We are too often inclined to desire the instant punishment of those who do injustice or show unkindness to us. The method which our Lord would have us adopt is slower, but far surer, namely, to win over our foes to be our friends, by the display of love.

4. The last lesson, taught in the concluding verses of the chapter, is one which we have already had brought before us, but it is one which needs constant repetition. A single virtuous act, or a single impulse towards goodness, is not the same thing as a virtuous life. It is easy to express devotion to God's service in our words, but it is not easy to express it by deeds. There always have been, and there always will be, difficulties in the way of one who desires to live a godly life. It is, indeed, these difficulties that make life what it is often called—a conflict, or a scene of trial. Yet we ought not to wish there were no difficulties, for it is by conquering them that we gain strength and confidence. The

peace of mind which comes when we have, by God's help, conquered the difficulties raised up by our idleness or our timidity, is one of the best gifts which God bestows on man. But we cannot receive that gift, except by most diligent watchfulness, and perseverance; and therefore, we need the very solemn warning, 'No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'

LESSON 169.

Read St. Luke x.

THE earlier part of this chapter is taken up with matters so easy to understand that elaborate comments upon them are unnecessary. The parable of the Good Samaritan, however, requires careful consideration. It was spoken by our Lord in answer to the question 'Who is my neighbour?' The question was put by a student of the Law of Moses, who had entered so fully into its teaching as to know that its great precepts were summed up in the two commandments—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'

We shall understand this parable the better if we divide our consideration into three parts: (1) the scene of the action, (2) the persons engaged in it, (3) the lesson to be drawn for ourselves.

1. The scene of the action described in the parable is the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This road passes through a very dreary and desolate tract of country; it lies in a deep, rocky ravine, and in many parts is darkened, even in the day-time, by the overhanging rocks. Such a road would naturally be the haunt of robbers; and to this day it is considered dangerous to travel by it without an escort of soldiers. The desolate and dangerous character of the scene helps us to understand what excuses the priest and the Levite may have given to themselves for their haste in passing on, and also enables us to appreciate better the kindness of the Samaritan.

2. The persons. These are—the wounded man, who seems to have been a Jew; the priest, whose duty it was to offer the appointed sacrifices in the name of the people, and to remind them of their duties towards God; the Levite, or priest's assistant; and the Samaritan. The priest and the Levite saw the sad condition of the wounded man, but passed by without rendering him any assistance, although, from their very office, he had the strongest claims upon them. Then came the Samaritan, who had pity on the sufferer; he did all that he could for his immediate relief, and took him to a place where he would be well cared for. We cannot rightly understand the benevolence of the Good

Samaritan without recalling to our minds the fact that between Jews and Samaritans there had been for ages the greatest enmity. The Samaritans, although they sometimes claimed the name of descendants of Jacob, were in reality mainly foreigners. They were the descendants of the heathen settlers introduced into Palestine by the kings of Assyria, to supply the place of the Israelites of the ten northern tribes, who were taken into captivity. As years went on, they learnt the worship of the True God, but their forms and ceremonies were never exactly the same as those of the Jews who worshipped at Jerusalem, and the Jews never acknowledged them as holders of the same faith. Many jealousies arose between the two peoples, and these jealousies ripened into hatred and hostility about the time when the Temple at Jerusalem was rebuilding under Nehemiah and Zerubbabel. We do not know how the Samaritans as a nation spoke of the Jews, but we know that the Jews always looked upon the Samaritans as worse than any heathens. When the rulers of the Jews wanted to express their utmost dislike of our Saviour, they said to Him, 'Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.' And we find, from the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Now it was one of this despised and hated people that showed charity and humanity to a distressed Jew, whom the priest and the Levite had passed by. The Samaritan might have said, 'This man belongs to the Jewish people, who hate my people; why should I stop and expose myself to danger in this wild place, to help him? perhaps if I do he will not even thank me.' But he did nothing of the kind: he bound up the man's wounds, and took upon himself the expense of paying somebody to attend to the sufferer until he recovered.

3. The lesson of the parable. When our Lord had finished the story of the man's suffering and relief, He asked, 'Which of these three was neighbour to the man that fell among thieves?' Any one of us would answer, 'The Good Samaritan.' But now, what did our Lord intend us to learn from this very touching parable? One thing, at all events, namely, the power of love in the heart of a man who has understood the great commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' There was no claim upon the Good Samaritan arising out of common nationality or common religion; all his early prejudices and education would probably tend the other way. *But his heart was loving; and that love overcame all the prejudices of nationality, religion, and education:* a man was in trouble; the common humanity of the sufferer and himself appealed to the Good Samaritan, and therefore he gave his willing and ready help. And our Saviour says, not only to the lawyer, but to

us, 'Go, and do thou likewise.' Wherever there is a person whom you can help in any way, there is one who is included under the term 'neighbour.' One verse from St. John's Epistles may be quoted at the end of this lesson, to show how, without obedience, such as we have been considering, to the second of the great commandments, we cannot advance to obedience to the first, namely, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.' St. John says, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' (1 John iv. 20.)

LESSON 170.

Read St. Luke xi. 1—13.

NOWHERE, even in the Bible, would it be possible to find so much meaning put into so few and so simple words as in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th verses of this chapter. They contain the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples to use, and which, from that circumstance, is called the Lord's Prayer. The language is so simple that it is impossible to make it simpler by any explanation. It was almost a habit of the disciples to ask for explanations of our Lord's teaching, but we do not find that any disciple asked for an explanation of this prayer. They must all have felt at once that it expressed their holiest thoughts and desires in language unequalled in beauty and simplicity.

Without, then, attempting any explanation of the words of the Lord's Prayer, we may yet find many things to notice which will help us to use it more intelligently. First, we should notice that although our Lord taught His disciples to ask for blessings for themselves and their brethren, blessings both to their bodies and their souls, yet He did not put these petitions in a prominent place: He did not exclude them from the Prayer, and that teaches us that we may and should 'make our requests' for such blessings 'known unto God,' in prayer; but He placed before any of them those words which express desires for the manifestation of God's glory; this, it seems, should teach us that the first object of our holiest and highest thoughts should be, not any benefit to ourselves, but the glory of God who made and preserves us. 'Hallowed be Thy name: Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so in earth.' These are the first petitions of the Prayer, and those which follow are mainly requests for grace and strength that we may be able to do our part in the fulfilment of these; that is to say, that no weakness of body, no fickleness of will, may prevent us from keeping God's name holy, helping in the establishment of His kingdom, and obeying His commandments.

But if we want not only to understand the words of the Lord's Prayer, but to feel and say it with our whole hearts, we must consider the way in which those words are illustrated, and made living and powerful, by the teaching, and still more by the life and example, of our Saviour Himself. The very first words, 'Our Father,' should remind us how often He spoke of His Father in Heaven, whose work He was always ready to do, and whose glory He was always seeking. We should remember what He taught concerning the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God; how it was a kingdom not of outward show and splendour, but of power over men's hearts. Then we should remember the history of His life of continued self-denial, and of His boundless love for us. We should remember His sore temptation in the wilderness, and how He met and triumphed over it. We should remember the scene in the garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed, 'Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.' We should remember His words spoken in His agony, when He was nailed to the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'¹ The more deeply we meditate in this manner on the example and the life of Christ, the more truly shall we be enabled to join in this Prayer, and the more nearly shall we reach what is the true end of all prayer, namely, the subjection of our wills to the will of God.

St. Matthew tells us, that before our Saviour taught this Prayer to His disciples, He gave them a strong and earnest warning against thoughtless, inattentive repetitions of prayers in which the heart takes no part. His words were, 'But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.' What our Saviour forbids in these words is the degradation of prayer from a spiritual to a mechanical action; or, in other words, He warns us against supposing that the mere repetition of sacred words can constitute true prayer. We know from heathen writers, of the time of which we are reading, that many of the heathen fancied that they could, by sufficient urgency in *repeating* their prayers, induce their gods to grant through fatigue what they would not grant of goodwill. The mechanical theory of prayer has been, and still is, practised in a most extreme form by some half-barbarous tribes of the interior of Asia. They write their petitions on strips of paper, which they enclose in a gourd furnished with vanes. Then they place the gourd so that it can be turned round either by a stream

¹ I would advise the teacher to take these, and similar illustrations which will at once occur to his mind,

and exercise the children in finding out the petitions of the Lord's Prayer to which they best apply.

of water or by the wind; and so they go away to their business or their pleasure, leaving their prayers to say themselves, for they fancy that every turn of the gourd is equivalent to one repetition of the written prayer it contains. But it is of more importance for us to consider the application of our Lord's words to ourselves. What they teach us is the immense difference between *saying prayers* and *praying*: the first is a matter only of the lips, the second of the heart. We should remember that *any* prayer may become a 'vain repetition,' even this Lord's Prayer itself, if it be thoughtlessly or carelessly used. One of our poets makes a man say:

'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;
Words without thoughts never to Heaven go.'

Prayers of this kind, our Saviour teaches us, are unacceptable offerings to God. The prayers which alone He hears and accepts are those which come from the heart, and they alone are the prayers in answer to which we can hope to receive from God strength and comfort in discharging the duties and passing through the trials of life.

The remaining verses are encouragements to us to be constant in the practice of true, sincere prayer, and assure us that, in answer to prayer, God will give us the greatest of all blessings—the assistance of His Holy Spirit.

LESSON 171.

Read St. Luke xi. 14—54.

THIS passage gives us an account of the first direct opposition that was made to the teaching and work of our Saviour. There were some who admitted that He possessed extraordinary power, but declared that it came not from a good but from an evil source. Our Lord's answer to this statement was mainly an appeal to the nature of the works He performed. He asked those who opposed Him to consider the absurdity which was involved in supposing that an evil spirit would give any man power to be used against itself.

Towards the end of the chapter we find another kind of opposition. The Pharisees, who, as we have seen, were disposed to lay great stress upon outward forms and ceremonies, were angry with Jesus because He neglected some practices which they considered essential. Their narrowness and intolerance called forth words of withering condemnation. Our Saviour tore away the veil which concealed their motives, and let them understand that

He knew well how mean they were. We may regard this as an important epoch in the life of our Lord, for it was the commencement of that open warfare between Himself and the rulers of the Jews, which ended in His trial and crucifixion.

The teaching of our Saviour with respect to the motives of our conduct cannot be illustrated better than by the 34th, 35th, and 36th verses of this chapter, which, accordingly, we will make the main subject of this lesson. They are as follows:—‘The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.’

These verses warn us against allowing impure motives to steal into our minds and mix themselves with our good desires, thus drawing us away from the paths of virtue. Probably, the commonest passions which thus stealthily creep into men's minds are those of vanity and anger. Let us take some illustrations of vanity. We often see a man undertake some good public work from the best motives. If it be attended with success, and be a work easily appreciated, he is, in the present day, generally rewarded with lavish and dangerous praise. At first, this praise does not destroy the singleness of his purpose; but day by day it grows sweeter in his ear, until at last he becomes dependent upon it, and ends by shaping his conduct rather with the object of keeping up the enthusiasm of his admirers, than of promoting the work in hand. We have another illustration in the bad effect sometimes produced upon young people by the lavish bestowal of prizes and honours. The only proper use of prizes is to draw our attention to ends we should desire to reach, and to mark the progress we have made towards attaining them; but the desire to gain such rewards should never be allowed to take the place of a steady sense of duty, which is the first and only true guide for our conduct. If we value the prizes and the praise more than the silent approval of our own consciences, the prizes are doing us harm, and fostering in us a disposition which in later life will lead us to value the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Now let us turn to the other passion of anger, which also often corrupts motives at first pure and holy. How often do we see men earnest in advocating some great truth, or some reform, at first from the purest motives, but, as they proceed, encountering opposition which greatly irritates them. In their anger they often, by displays of bitterness and ill-temper, strengthen opposition, which may have arisen chiefly from ignorance, and which a little

patience and gentleness would have disarmed. It is most sad to see a good work thus ruined by the angry violence of those who have taken it in hand; and to find that the men who are doing the mischief, are all the while deceiving themselves by the belief that their bitter dislike and impatience of opposition is a deep love of the work. This evil also may be further illustrated by an example which will be easily understood by the young. In many schools the older scholars are entrusted with certain limited authority over the younger ones. To young people, placed in such a position, these verses especially apply; they must beware that a desire to correct the faults of others does not degenerate into mere angry impatience, and must be careful not to mistake irritability for zeal.

One lesson which we learnt from the story of our Saviour's temptation, was how to treat thoughts and motives which are clearly bad, and as to the nature of which we cannot for a moment be in doubt; these verses caution us against a more common and less apparent danger. Downright bad thoughts seldom suggest themselves to a well-regulated mind, but mixed motives are constantly tempting us all. The Bible refers to their danger again and again. For example, besides this passage, we have the proverb, quoted frequently in these lessons: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.' *Here the words, 'with diligence,' point to the vigilance which we must exercise to keep away the kind of bad motives which, like vanity and anger, do not at once shock our consciences so violently as some others.* Again, we have the saying of Jeremiah, pointing to very nearly the same thought: 'The heart is deceitful above all things;' and lastly, we have the touching prayer of the Psalmist, which not only shows us the danger, but also how we may escape from it. He prays, in a humble sense of human frailty, 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.'

LESSON 172.

St. Luke xi. 34—36 (continued).

THE greater part of our last lesson was devoted to the consideration of three verses; we then tried to understand their general teaching. To-day let us see how the same words bear with special force upon one very common sin, that of drunkenness.

This is not often a sin of early youth; but we must not study the Bible, while we are young, only to find guidance for our early life, or safeguards against only those temptations which then beset us. We must use the Bible to establish in our minds, at the age when we are most easily influenced and impressed, such principles,

convictions, and feelings as will aid us in the trials and temptations of our later life.

When men are burdened by the sorrows and worn out with the fatigues of life, the temptation to seek in drinking a short passing relief, sometimes becomes very strong. And it is all the more dangerous because the fall from sobriety to drunkenness is seldom altogether sudden, the descent is not made at one leap. *On the contrary, the habit of drinking too much generally grows very gradually, and has often become deeply rooted, before the person who has acquired it has reached the point of what is commonly called intemperance.* The extent of the danger is to be judged by the number of persons who fall victims to it.

In our consideration of the story of our Lord's temptation, and of the parable of the Sower, we have learnt some of the surest ways by which we may prepare ourselves to meet and to prevail over all kinds of temptation. There are, however, other ways by which we may establish ourselves in the paths of right, and fortify ourselves against the attacks of evil. One such way is by nourishing from our earliest years a holy horror of certain sins which we see are too common among our fellow-men. It is the purpose of this lesson to cultivate such a horror of the sin of drunkenness; and the best way of attaining that purpose seems to be to enquire in what the sinfulness of drunkenness really lies. The verses now before us tell us this.

Let us read over the words once more:—‘The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. *Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.*’

Almost our first lesson from the Old Testament taught us that God created man in His own image, and distinguished him from the beasts that perish by endowing him with the lights of conscience and reason. These lights are God's highest gift to man. *The sin of drunkenness, apart from all the terrible evils it brings upon mankind, consists in this, that when men get drunk, they part, by their own act, with these great gifts; they put out these glorious lights, and for the time destroy the image of God in their souls.* Surely, then, drunkenness, in itself, even when attended by no bad consequences to others, is a very great sin. Let us try to realise what it is to descend, voluntarily, from the high position in which God has placed us among reasoning beings, and to take our rank, even for a short time, among the lower animals. The degradation of drunkenness makes it, under any circumstances, a sin; and, like all other sins, it in time destroys the whole character. Drunkards, who have originally been weak, rather than bad men, in time

become selfish, and often very deceitful and dishonest. Drunkenness saps all the strength of a man's virtue, just as surely as a long-continued bodily disease saps the strength of the whole body. Many a man, who may have been at one time a kind father and a good husband, has been made by this sin so utterly heartless and selfish as to care little if his wife and children starve, if only he can still indulge his depraved tastes.

This leads us to consider the effects of drunkenness upon other persons than the drunkard himself.

It is not necessary to dwell on the misery, and often moral degradation, which drunkenness inflicts on the persons for whose welfare the drunkard is most responsible, that is, on the members of his own family. Such reflections are unnecessary, for the very sad and simple reason, that these consequences are so common as to force themselves on the attention of almost everyone at an early age. Let us consider another less obvious class of consequences, namely, those to which the general public are exposed. In the first place, a large part of the rates and taxes to which we are subject, and which press so heavily on the poorer classes, is levied to meet the consequences of drunkenness. The number and cost of our gaols, workhouses, lunatic asylums, and policemen, now so great, would be comparatively insignificant, were it not for the crime, disease, and improvidence, of which drunkenness is the parent. The whole cost of these institutions comes out of the pockets of the people in the shape of rates and taxes.¹ Thus every one of us is fined for the drunkard's sins; and yet we often hear the silly, thoughtless expression, that the drunkard is only his own enemy. We must remember also that when a man has once separated himself from his reason and conscience, it is clear that the succession of his deeds must be wholly a chapter of accidents. A drunkard, who leaves his body uncontrolled by reason or conscience, and with its animal passions inflamed by drink, to wanton among his fellow-men, is guilty of the same kind of sinful carelessness as a man who turns a dangerous dog into the streets. If the dog does no harm, the man's sin is exactly the same as if it worries somebody; the extent of his recklessness as to other people's safety, not what actually does happen, is the measure of his guilt. A terrible fact will show how close is the likeness between this imagined case and the real case of a certain drunkard. Not long ago a man was hanged for murdering his mother in a very brutal manner. Before his death he said that he could never have committed the crime if he had been sober, but that he had been too drunk to know what

¹ As the young must often hear their parents groaning over the 'rate-bills,' it is very desirable that

the teacher should make clear to the scholars the connection between drunkenness and heavy rates.

he was doing. It was for the murder that the Judge sentenced him to be hanged; but, in the sight of God, the man began the great sin when he depraved himself by drunkenness; that is to say, when he turned the light within him into darkness, and, placing his acts out of the control of his conscience and reason, left his body at large to follow its wild impulses, like that of any unreasoning animal.

If in youth we understand the full wickedness of drunkenness, and nourish by every means a horror of it, we shall be the less tempted to it when we grow up, and shall never feel inclined to speak lightly of it, as too many sober people do. Whenever we smile, or make fun of the drunkard as he staggers past, we lessen our own horror of the vice, and the horror of those around us, and we thus help to break down the barriers which might protect ourselves and others from the temptation.

But it does not follow that, because we have a horror of drunkenness, we should have a horror of the drunkard, or that we should thank God that we are not like unto him. We cannot measure the moral guilt of others, and must therefore leave judgment to God. Much more wisely and humbly may we say to ourselves, 'Let me never forget what drunkenness really means, and may God grant that I never fall into it!'

LESSON 173.

Read St. Luke xii.

THIS chapter commences with a continuation of our Lord's denunciation of the heartlessness and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but it soon passes on to teaching which is intended for us all.

A great part of the chapter warns us against undue anxiety for the future, especially against anxiety about our food and clothing.

This part of the chapter is also very interesting, because it shows us how naturally and beautifully our Saviour drew illustrations for His teaching from objects around Him. We must bear in mind that, for the most part, His teaching was out-door teaching, and was given in the midst of a great deal of natural beauty; the birds were flying all around the Teacher and His disciples, and the plains and valleys through which they walked were covered with vegetation. Some of the valleys of Palestine are described by modern travellers as being so full of flowers as to look like gardens. What lesson did our Saviour wish His disciples to learn from the birds and the flowers? Some persons have said that the plain meaning of His reference to them is that it is wrong for Christian men to make any provision for the future. But that is not true. First of all, there is a great contrast between such natural things

as birds and flowers, and human beings: the birds neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn: we do sow and reap, and store up the autumn corn as a supply for the whole year; the lilies do not toil or spin; human beings do, and so make themselves clothes. This power of working for a definite purpose is one of the things which make human beings superior to the creatures around them. But still, the power is unavailing without God's care and protection. If, then, the creatures to whom He has given only instinct, or those to which He has given only vegetable life, are cared for by Him and protected by His providence, how foolish and even sinful it must be for us to think that we shall be unable, if we use rightly the faculties of reason and foresight, which He has given us, to obtain all things necessary for the support of our lives! The lesson is thus, not an encouragement of carelessness and improvidence, but an encouragement to trust in the providence of God. Still, our Saviour wishes us to desire most earnestly spiritual blessings, and to live, not as creatures to whom death is the end of all, but as beings who have before us a life of immortality. He teaches us to remember that, after we have passed away from earth, we may have a home in Heaven, and to set our best hopes upon that heavenly home; 'for,' He says, 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

There are two parables contained in the chapter we have read, about each of which we must say a few words.

1. The parable of the rich fool.

Covetousness is the vice against which this parable is intended to warn us. Now when we use the word covetousness, we generally mean desiring something that belongs to another person. But we are not told in the parable that the rich man desired other men's fruits or goods; he simply intended to keep all his own to himself; he would build barns to store all the abundant produce of his estate, and then would enjoy himself. His sin appears to have been utter selfishness; he must have known some poor people to whom even a small portion of his wealth would have been a great help; but he did not care if they starved; he thought of himself only. This selfishness, then, is in God's sight a great sin. But what has that to do with covetousness? Very much, and in this way: a man who indulges selfish desires is led on, very much more easily than he thinks, to thoughts and desires which tend to the injury and loss of other men, and so selfishness leads to covetousness. But, besides that, selfishness of the kind which this rich man showed is really dishonest. None of us receive advantages only for our own benefit, but that we may share

them with others ; we cannot live human lives if we live only for ourselves. Love to our fellow-men must lead us to acts of love and kindness, or else our lives will be even to ourselves useless and unprofitable.

2. The parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants.

Many lessons may be learnt from this parable ; we will take only one, and that the most important. Our duty towards God must *always* be in our minds and in our hearts as the great moving power of all our actions. Doing right only now and then, when doing right comes easy to us, exposes us to God's displeasure. We must always be on the watch, both against the assaults of evil, and for the voice of God calling us to duty ; then we shall be in the state of the faithful servants in the parable, of whom our Saviour Himself says, 'Blessed are those servants.'

LESSON 174.

Read St. Luke xiii.

THE circumstance alluded to in the first verses of this chapter is not recorded in any other history. That a tumult should have arisen among Galileans assembled at one of the feasts, and that it should have been quelled remorselessly, is quite in accordance with what we learn from history of the disposition of the Galileans, and of the character of Pilate, who was at that time the Roman governor, or procurator of Judæa. The Galileans were the most turbulent of all the inhabitants of Palestine, and Pilate was a man who would not hesitate to commit acts of great cruelty in the maintenance of order. The people who told Jesus of the occurrence very probably did so by way of appealing to His patriotic feelings, and at the same time of finding out what He thought of the sin, which alone, in their opinion, could have resulted in such fearful consequences. But He turned the incident to a nobler use, and made it, and another case of sudden death, probably well known at the time, the occasion of teaching a great moral lesson. People were prone then, as they are now, to consider cases of sudden death as signs of God's displeasure. Our Saviour's words correct this fault : He does not teach us to say that such persons are blameless, or that their deaths are *not* instances of God's judgments, but He warns us to think at such times of ourselves and our own sins : He tells us that such calamities ought to lead us to repentance and amendment of life : we should judge ourselves sternly and justly, but should leave the judgment of others to God, who alone can judge perfectly. The lesson is the same as is conveyed in the words of the Sermon on the Mount—'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

The parable of the fruitless fig-tree was designed to teach the disciples how strict and terrible a judgment of God was about to be sent upon the Jewish nation. Spite of all the advantages they had enjoyed, from the time when they were chosen by God to be His peculiar people, they had not obeyed God's will; they were like a fig-tree planted in a vineyard, where it had all the advantages of soil and cultivation, which never repaid the owner's expense by producing fruit. Such a tree became a cumberer of the ground: it was not only itself useless, but it occupied the space that might be filled by a productive tree. The owner of the vineyard might wait patiently for a time, but at last the time of waiting would come to an end, and the tree would be cut down. The time of our Saviour's ministry was very near the end of the period of waiting for the Jews: they did not repent; and soon their severest punishment came upon them. Of course the parable has a lesson for us as well, and that lesson cannot be expressed more forcibly than in our Lord's own words, in a later part of this chapter: 'There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.' All the blessings which are ours because we live in a Christian land, and are brought up in the knowledge of our duty to God and to our fellow-men, will avail us nothing, unless we avail ourselves of them by doing our duty. Having advantages, and not using them, puts us in a far worse condition than we should be in, if we had no advantages at all.

The strife between our Lord and the Jewish authorities, of which we have seen the beginning, went on, as we find from this chapter. He healed a woman who, for eighteen years, had been unable to stand upright. The deed of love and mercy was undisputed, and one would have thought that nobody could find fault with it. But it was done on the Sabbath. This made the ruler of the synagogue very angry, and, because he could not, or dared not, attack Jesus, he told the people that they were breaking the law by letting themselves be healed on the Sabbath day. This account furnishes another illustration of the fact that the mere outward observance of a form or ceremony, without regard to its meaning, deadens the spiritual sense, and prevents a person from exercising even ordinary kindness and humanity.

Two succeeding verses contain two very brief parables. That of the grain of mustard-seed shows how Christ's Church, called in the parable 'the kingdom of God,' should grow, or, as we may say, has grown, from a very small seed. During Christ's life, very few indeed were His followers; now Christians are to be found all over the world. The second parable shows the power of the new faith: as leaven works in meal, so the truths which Christ

taught have affected all the thoughts and actions of those who have grasped them.

The last verses of the chapter are very touching. They show us how deep was our Saviour's patriotism. He knew the sore trials that were soon to come upon His countrymen; His prophetic ear, as has been said, could already hear the thunder of the Roman battering-rams against the walls of Jerusalem; and He could not bear, unmoved, the thought of the destruction of the beautiful and beloved city. But the greatest pain was caused to Him by the certainty that the desolation which He foresaw was being brought by the Jews upon themselves. He knew that if, even then, they would turn to the Living God, and obey His commandments, they would escape the impending doom; but He knew also that they would not repent. Hence His touching lamentation: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.'

LESSON 175.

Read St. Luke xiv.

THE question of Sabbath observances was again raised between our Lord and the Pharisees. We must, of course, beware of thinking that all these disputes occurred in the same place. At the time of which we are now reading, our Lord was gradually making His way to Jerusalem. In every village or town in which He made any stay, He would certainly meet with some members of the great party of the Pharisees, and so would be obliged to fight the same battle over and over again. The manner of His answer to their objections was very little varied: He almost always appealed to their natural sense, and asked them how they acted, when, on a Sabbath, any of their domestic animals required their assistance; then He sometimes stated in words, at other times left His hearers to draw the inference, that, as a man is better and worth more than an ox or an ass, kindly help to a man could not be wrong at a time when it was not unlawful to aid one of the lower animals.

After this there follow exhortations to modesty and humility, and also to disinterestedness in the performance of works of kindness, all of which are so plain and simple as to require no comment.

Then comes the parable of the Great Supper. In the opinion of many commentators, this parable has an immediate historical application to the condition of the Jewish people; but it has also, without doubt, a wider moral application. God is represented as

the giver of the supper; the joys which are the reward of a righteous life are represented by the supper; the promises of Scripture are represented by the invitations sent out; and the persons who, rejecting these promises, continue to lead a worldly, selfish life, are represented by the invited guests who excused themselves from attending the supper. Now let us mark that the persons who are described in the parable as forfeiting the joys in store for the righteous are accused of nothing more than worldliness. They are not represented as abusing or mocking the servants who brought the invitation. The men who made the excuses are, then, intended to represent persons who are neither profane nor hostile to religion, but simply too much occupied with their own worldly cares to have time to think of God, and of the duties which they owe to their fellow-men. They are very much the kind of persons referred to in one passage of the parable of the Sower: 'Some (seed) fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it;' a passage which our Lord explains thus: 'That which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.'

We must further observe that it is prosperity, and not adversity, which is represented in the parable as hardening the invited guests. In every case it is an increase in their goods which is their ground of excuse for not attending the supper. One has a new estate, another new cattle, and another has just married a wife. This teaching is in strict harmony with our experience of life. Without that experience we might have supposed that people who have the hardest struggle to get the necessities of life would be most absorbed in its cares, while the prosperous few, who have obtained all that this world can give, would be led, by gratitude to God and by their freedom from pressing worldly anxieties, to consider their higher duties. But this is far from being the case. The Bible is full of warnings against the dangers to our religious and moral life which attend prosperity; and so completely is the necessity for these warnings affirmed by the general experience of mankind, that nearly every language abounds with sayings or proverbs asserting it. One of the most solemn in the Bible is found in the last prophecy of Moses, in which he describes the effect of prosperity on the children of Israel. 'Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness: then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.' The same truth is set forth by contrast in the often-quoted line of Shakspeare: 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.'

But, though this parable contains a special warning to the very

prosperous, it is intended for others also, and warns all of us against the danger of neglecting God's promises. The parable concludes with words full of sad significance: 'I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.' Our Saviour evidently means in these words to give a *warning of their danger to all those who think that it is always 'time enough' to repent, and who go on continually delaying their change of life to a more convenient season.* The truth is, that the longer we delay the change, the more difficult does it become to us to make it. The longer the thorns are allowed to grow, the deeper struck and the wider spread are their roots, and the more likely are they to 'choke the word.' Worldliness and selfish devotion to our own pleasures and affairs get a stronger hold upon us the longer we indulge them; while, on the other hand, God's promises and warnings affect us less and less, each time we listen to them with careless ears. Good counsel, steadily rejected, only hardens us. This parable is, therefore, a very stern and solemn warning to us all, not to meet the conditions on which God's promises are made to us by excuses for delay.

The same moral is conveyed by the two brief parables at the end of the chapter, and by the figurative words, 'If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?'

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LESSON 176.

Read St. Luke xv.

THIS chapter contains three parables which are well-nigh the most attractive and comforting of any spoken by our Lord. They were addressed, as the first verse tells us, to publicans and sinners; to persons who, in the opinion of all their fellow-men, had sunk so low, as to be nearly, if not quite, excluded from all hope of better things. The main lesson of the three parables is the same, namely, that hearty and sincere repentance is accepted by God.

1. The parable of the Lost Sheep. Under the image of a lost sheep it has always been believed that our Saviour intended to describe the state of a person who has done wrong in sheer ignorance. The sheep wandered away from the fold, because it knew no better; but it would have perished in the wilderness, had not the shepherd gone to seek it and bring it back. The picture of a shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders is one of the earliest that has been found of Christian pictures; the earliest Christian artists drew it again and again as a symbol of the Saviour's love and tenderness.

2. The parable of the Lost Piece of Money. This parable has generally been regarded as showing how human agencies may co-

operate with the Divine, in the work of the restoration of sinners, who have been allowed to wander into the ways of sin by the carelessness of others. The lost piece of money was stamped with the effigy of the monarch from whose mint it was issued, and was lost by the woman to whom it was entrusted. Thus, it is believed, our Lord intended to represent persons who have had some knowledge of God, but who have been neglected by their fellow-Christians. The efforts which are now made in all Christian countries for the reformation of criminals and the education of the ignorant, are represented by the action of the woman in sweeping the house till she finds the missing coin. The finding of the coin—that is, the restoration of a sinner—is a cause of joy, not only to the woman, the Christian Church, but also to the angels of God, and to God Himself.

3. The parable of the Prodigal Son. In this parable two great truths are taught us with equal emphasis, no doubt because our Lord thought it well that they should always be linked together in our minds.

It is quite clear who are meant by the father and the wandering son in this parable. In the Lord's Prayer, our Saviour teaches us to pray to God as the Father; and it is as a Father, whose love and patience are inexhaustible, that He here represents God. The prodigal son, on the other hand, represents a wilful sinner.

The first truth insisted upon is that sin most surely brings misery and sorrow in its train. 'Sin and sorrow,' says a great writer, 'however they may tarry apart for a time, are sure to find one another out in the end.' The prodigal son had known his father's love, but had chosen to leave his father's home, and wander away into a far country, where he wasted his substance with riotous living. The description of his starving state, when, after his wealth was gone, he envied the very swine their food, is intended to set before us the very lowest depths of misery and degradation. It is meant to show us the condition into which those persons must fall, who, having once known God's love, make themselves strangers to Him, and choose to walk in the ways of sin. We must specially observe that, great as the love of the father is shown to be, it is not represented in this parable as in any way lessening the misery of the prodigal son, so long as he remained in the 'far country.' The parable does not give us the least encouragement to hope that God's love will protect us from the inevitable consequences of wicked deeds. This, then, is the first great truth, that, sooner or later, in some form or other, our sins will bring upon us pain and suffering. When we have learnt this lesson, we are prepared to receive, and to use rightly, the second great truth which our Saviour sets forth in this parable, under the image of the return of

the prodigal to his father's home, and the welcome with which his father receives him. In this way Christ teaches us that, however fallen a man may be, God never closes the door of hope upon him, if he become truly penitent. The parable, as a whole, teaches us that though we must suffer severely for all our sins, we may hope for ultimate forgiveness if we change our wills, and, as St. Paul expresses it, put on a new man; and it teaches us also never to look on any of our fellow-men, however low and degraded their condition may appear to be, as hopelessly beyond the reach of God's all-seeing love and Christ's redeeming power.

LESSON 177.

Read St. Luke xvi.

THE parable of the Unjust Steward, which is contained in the first twelve verses of this chapter, is one of the most difficult to understand of all that were spoken by our Lord. But it teaches one plain lesson which we may dwell upon. One of the greatest dangers to which we are exposed is the danger of half-heartedness in the service of God: our Saviour teaches us that we ought to be as earnest and persevering in our work done for God, as we are in the work which we do for our own advantage. Even the business pursuits which occupy so great a portion of our time, must not be followed in such a way as to lead us to forget that there is a life to come, our state in which will be mainly dependent upon our conduct in this life. This lesson is enforced in the weighty words which immediately follow the parable: 'No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' The meaning is very plain: if we devote all our thought and energy to what is commonly called 'getting on in the world,' we must thereby be guilty of neglecting our duty towards God.

The latter part of the chapter contains the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Briefly, this parable displays a double contrast between two persons; first, the contrast between them in this life, in which all seems to be in the favour of the rich man; secondly, the contrast between them in the life to come, in which the advantage is even more clearly on the side of the poor man.

That we may understand rightly the lessons involved in these contrasts, we must carefully consider what is the exact nature of the offence with which the rich man is charged. We must observe that he is not accused of being a cruel, ill-natured man, void of all natural affection. He was willing that Lazarus should pick up the crumbs which fell from his table, provided that Lazarus in no

way interfered with his pleasures. Even in the torments of hell, he did not forget his own family; he desired most earnestly that a timely warning might be given to his brothers, that so they might be saved from his own most miserable fate. The rich man is accused simply of having made a thoroughly selfish and sensual use of the bounteous gifts which God had entrusted to him. He might have gone out of his way, and, at some sacrifice of his own ease, might have alleviated the poor beggar's sufferings; that he did not do so is attributed to him as a great crime. He lived for himself only, and in this parable such a selfish life is condemned in language as severe as any which ever passed our Saviour's lips. He teaches us, in this parable, that we all are brethren, and, as brethren, bound to give each other all the kindly, brotherly help we can. But the parable does not apply only to the use or abuse of wealth in the form of money. It applies to all persons who have great blessings and powers of any kind bestowed upon them. For example, the statesman who has great abilities, the doctor who is specially skilled in the art of healing, the man of business who has wide experience of the affairs of the world, and, lastly, the man whose leisure has enabled him to acquire much knowledge—all these are possessors of great powers, which they must not use exclusively for their own benefit, as the rich man used his money, lest they share his condemnation.

We must not leave this parable without alluding to another grave warning which it contains, and which, like so many of the deepest truths of Scripture, is conveyed in very few words. The words which convey the warning are those of the 31st verse, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.' We are warned in these words that if we try to close our hearts to truths which are disagreeable to us, we may succeed in so doing to our own destruction, and that so thoroughly, that no novelty of the way in which the truths may be proclaimed will bring them home to us; we shall not in such a case be persuaded, even 'though one rose from the dead.' We may, as we are here told, easily harden our hearts to the whole Christian revelation, and live on in selfish ease, until, like the rich man, we are awakened too late to our folly, by the consequences inseparable from the mispending of our lives.

LESSON 178.

Read St. Luke xvii.

THE opening verses of this chapter contain a very earnest warning. Let us read them again. 'Then said He unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through

whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.'

It is necessary to observe that the words 'offend' and 'offence' are not here used in their modern sense, but in their old sense, which was 'causing a man to stumble.' This saying, therefore, condemns in very severe language all persons who, whether deliberately or thoughtlessly, do anything which tempts their fellow-men to sin. If we consider it in all the fulness of its meaning, we shall find that this saying sets before us, in a very broad and striking light, our mutual responsibilities. Many passages from the Epistles might be quoted to show the wide view of these responsibilities which was taken by Christ's immediate followers. Let us take as an example the 12th and 13th verses of the 14th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. 'So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.' It behoves us to consider carefully how we may escape the severe condemnation which our Saviour passes upon those who cause their fellow-men to stumble; and, as very young children may err in this matter, let us consider their case first. Even while they are still in the nursery, children begin to spoil one another's temper by wanton teasing; and therefore it is very important that those who have charge of young children should try to make them see that such teasing is wrong, not merely because it gives immediate annoyance, but chiefly because it tends to do lasting injury to the temper and disposition. In later days, at school, the young often do each other more serious mischief. The self-respect and peace of mind of many a timid school-boy have been destroyed by some act, into the commission of which he has been bullied or ridiculed by his companions. Many boys of sociable and impressible natures have had their better feelings lastingly weakened and perverted by the conversation and example of thoughtless schoolfellows. Indeed, it is quite marvellous how much permanent mischief the young occasionally do in a very short time to the characters of their companions. Of the ways in which, in maturer years, men cause their fellow-men to stumble, only a few suggestive instances can be given. We sin in this respect whenever we darken the reason and conscience of others by needlessly rousing their anger, or bringing into play any other of the weaker or lower elements of their character. It is, for example, of the utmost importance that all teachers and monitors should chide or punish a child in a calm, self-possessed manner, so as to make the child feel that his teacher is acting thoughtfully, on principle, and

with system. If we correct children fitfully, under the passing impulses of impatience and irritation, not only does the lesson carry little weight, but such punishment tends to injure their characters. Hasty, incessant nagging, or passionate abuse, either crows and discourages a child, or irritates and hardens it, according to what may be its natural disposition. It is always injurious, and thus proves a stumbling-block, more or less serious, in the child's path. Especially are we blameable, if we allow ourselves by sarcasm or insult to embitter religious differences. It is desirable above all things that men, weak and erring as they are, should hold their faith with reverence and modesty; and if we embitter religious differences by hard words, we are most likely to raise in the minds of those who differ from us a self-assertion which is entirely out of harmony with the Christian spirit.

Perhaps wit and wealth are the gifts which their possessors most commonly allow to become stumbling-blocks to their neighbours. The abuse of riches will be considered more particularly in a later lesson; here we will refer only to the abuse of wit. Natural wit is frequently so employed as to lessen men's reverence for what they ought to venerate and respect, and, still more frequently, so as to diminish men's horror for what they ought to loathe and detest. The natural shrinking which young persons generally feel from some kinds of sins is often greatly weakened, if not wholly put an end to, by the levity with which they hear such sins spoken of. The temptation to give utterance to every witty thought which flashes across the mind, is said to be so great that few men have sufficient self-command and self-denial to resist it; and thus many great wits, if they have reflected at all, must have felt that a great and rare gift, most useful if properly employed, had been so used by them as to have done far more harm than good.

This chapter further contains some lessons, at once simple and beautiful, on the forgiveness of injuries, on spiritual humility, and on gratitude. It closes with a discourse in which our Lord warns us to be ever on our guard and watchful for His coming, and which contains a repetition of the saying, elsewhere commented upon: 'Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.'

LESSON 179.

Read St. Luke xviii.

THE first parable contained in this chapter is evidently designed to teach us the necessity of earnestness and perseverance in our prayers. To ask God for something that we do not want or earnestly desire, is not prayer at all, but mockery. We will postpone the consideration of the next parable to the close of the lesson.

The very brief account which follows, of our Saviour's treatment of little children, has always been felt to be one of the most attractive stories in the whole Gospel. Pictures almost innumerable have been drawn of the scene. His disciples probably did not mean to be unkind to the parents, who wished Jesus to touch and bless their children, but they thought that He had more important work to do. The reception of the children by our Saviour, and His words, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven,' are encouraging, not to children only, but to all persons, whatever their age may be, who are willing to become like children, in humility and trustfulness.

A sad contrast follows, namely, the case of a man who excluded himself from the kingdom of God. The rich man's trust in his riches, his love for his wealth, which was greater than his love for Christ, made him unlike a child. He went away in sorrow, and Jesus also was sorrowful. How deeply important is this lesson! Our service of God must be undivided: if we put anything in preference to God's glory, we bring sorrow upon ourselves, and cause sorrow to our Saviour.

After this, and, as it seems, with the feeling of sadness still present to Him, our Saviour declared to His disciples what would be the end of the journey to Jerusalem. They heard Him speak of His kingdom, and believed that it was soon to be established at Jerusalem, the chief city of the land. They were so full of the thought of an earthly kingdom, that they could not understand what He said about betrayal, suffering, and death. It was not the first time He had spoken of such things, but, as on previous occasions, the disciples could not take in the meaning; they had not learnt the lessons He had taught them, especially that very important lesson, 'He that loseth his life shall preserve it.' Indeed, it was not until He had actually died and risen again, that they began to understand His purpose of self-sacrifice.

The miracle of healing the blind man calls for one remark only. The title by which the blind man addressed our Saviour, 'Thou Son of David,' was an acknowledgment on his part that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah.

Now let us return to the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

This parable is plainly a lesson on the presumption of comparing our own righteousness with that of our neighbours. The Pharisee was eminently satisfied with himself, and compared his own good deeds with the deeds of the Publican. We have no reason for thinking that the Pharisee stated anything which was not true: he was probably in all outward things a more religious man than the

Publican. But he could not judge of the trials and temptations which the Publican had to undergo. Least of all could he know the struggle which was then going on in the mind of the Publican, between the sense of sin, and the desire to get rid of it. The Pharisee seems also to have been quite ignorant of the sinfulness of his own heart. He thought that his outward deeds could make him acceptable to God. He did not think that he wanted anything, and therefore he asked nothing; the Publican, on the other hand, knew that he wanted pardon, and, having asked for it, 'went down to his house justified,' ready to begin a new and better life. Heartless comparisons of ourselves with others are sure to result in spiritual pride and vanity, and to prevent our making any attempt to amend our faults. St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, uses words which form a good comment on this parable; with them we will close our lesson. He says, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; *charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up*, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, *thinketh no evil*; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, *believeth all things, hopeth all things*, endureth all things.'

LESSON 180.

Read St. Luke xix. 1-27.

THE beginning of the passage which we have just read tells of the way in which our Lord was received as He was passing through Jericho. It was probably while He was resting in the house of Zacchæus that He gave His disciples the parable of the Ten Pieces of Money. Its first object was to correct the false impressions which the disciples had fostered in their minds concerning the nature of His kingdom; but it has lessons which apply exactly to us all, and which will never lose their force. Put in few words, our Saviour's teaching in this parable is that all of us have certain advantages entrusted to us, with the aid of which we have certain work to perform, and that we shall one by one be called to give a very strict account of the way in which we have done it. The truth may be applied in many ways, and we shall do well to dwell upon it at some length.

First of all, let us remember that it applies to young people as well as to those who are grown-up, and to our regular daily work quite as much as to those extra works of kindness which we call, for the sake of distinction, 'good works.'

Many men have persuaded themselves that occasional 'good works' will atone in God's sight for the neglect of daily duty. The truth is, as we have already seen in previous lessons, that it is much easier to make occasional great efforts than small daily ones; much easier to be very zealous at times than by constant watchfulness to keep up to a high conscientious standard of daily duty. But it is the frequent, not the occasional, acts that form our characters, and we may be quite sure that the conscientious discharge of our daily duty is the first thing that God requires of us. Whatever may be our position in life, the welfare of our fellow-men depends more or less upon the manner in which we fill it. Many a ship has been lost with all hands, because one of the men employed in building her has fastened carelessly some, often only a *very few*, of the rivets in her side. Many a terrible railway accident has been caused by some bits of careless work in one of the carriage-wheels. Many a house has been burnt down, and lives have been lost, only because the chimney-flues had been plastered carelessly in one single spot. Many bad and often fatal accidents happen every year in this country, arising from the falls of horses, caused entirely by careless and clumsy shoeing. One of England's most trusted statesmen lost his life from this cause. It would undoubtedly startle us beyond measure if we could know the number of lives annually lost by fevers, caused entirely by the poisonous gases let into our houses by careless plumbing and brickwork. The prospects and characters of numbers of children are ruined every year by the carelessness of their teachers. Faulty, careless work of all kinds is highly displeasing in the sight of God, and we never know with what evils it may be fraught to others. Let us therefore take the counsel of Solomon, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it *with thy might*.'

Now, in youth, one of our daily duties is that of gaining knowledge, and of acquiring good habits, that we may fit ourselves for performing well the labour that is in store for us in manhood. This preparation of ourselves is an actual beginning of the work of life, just as it is the beginning of the work of a voyage when a captain is getting ready the sails which are to take his ship to her intended port. Let us take a great example. St. Paul is called the Apostle of the Gentiles, because he was so largely the means of making the Gospel known to them. He received it from on high, by revelation of God, but in his work of spreading it abroad he was greatly aided by his earthly, or what is often called secular,

learning. He was able by its means to put the truths of the Gospel in such a manner before the Gentiles, as to obtain a hearing for them. In his speeches he could refer to the writings of Gentile philosophers, and in his letters he makes frequent allusions to Gentile customs, in just such a way as must have attracted them to his teaching. Now, had St. Paul not been diligent in youth (as he specially tells us he was), he could not have been learned in manhood, and could not have done so thoroughly the great work which God committed to his hands.

Our case is not unlike his. If we lose our time and neglect our opportunities in youth, we can never know what may be the consequences hereafter; but of one thing we may be quite sure, namely, that by so doing we are wrapping up our Lord's gifts in a napkin, instead of using them as He intended them to be used, and are unfitting ourselves for the due discharge of the special duties which He has appointed for our later life.

NOTE.—I suggest that every teacher should add to the illustrations, given in this lesson, of the possible consequences of carelessness in our daily work, illustrations specially suited to the particular circumstances of his scholars. If people could only be brought to regard care in the discharge of daily work as a religious duty, not only would the practical evils of life be wonderfully lessened, but our daily tasks would partake less of the character of drudgery, and become more labours of love.

LESSON 181.

Read St. Luke **xix.** 12—27.

The Power of Example.

WE have just read again the parable of the Pieces of Money. In our last lesson we considered generally the question of opportunities entrusted to us. Let us now consider one special gift, in our use of which we need the teaching of the parable, namely, the *power of our example over others*. The influence which we exert by means of our example is a gift or power entrusted to all of us by God, who will call us to the strictest account for the use we make of it. Unlike many other gifts, we cannot wrap this up in a napkin, as the unprofitable servant treated his piece of money. If he did no good with his pound, he at least did no harm with it; but our example is like our shadow; we cannot part from it. Whatever our lot in life may be, whether high or lowly, our example is always active for good or for evil. It is always active, either weakening or strengthening those around us. The effect of preaching and precept may easily be exaggerated, for it is strange how often men seem at one moment deeply affected by the state-

ment of truths, which they forget the next, but it is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence of example. For instance, many men are first led to take to heart Christ's teaching and doctrines, by the moving story of His life. It is only when they have learnt to love Him for what He did, that they become vitally influenced by what He said.

Let us take other instances. There are in our army regiments of soldiers which have been remarkable for generations for the same qualities. Officers and men have been continually changing, but the special qualities of the regiment remain the same. Young men who enter the regiment acquire its special qualities naturally and easily, and pass them on to others by the mere force of example. Some of the best of these regiments were in the first instance brought to a high point of excellence by the efforts of some one officer, whose example altered its whole character, and whose spirit has thus continued to command it for years after his body had been laid in the grave. Another illustration may teach us a much needed lesson, namely, that the example which we set does not begin to influence others only when we are grown up, and have conspicuous duties to perform. The example of the young is very powerful over their companions. Indeed, the young are often more influenced by companions of their own age than by the advice or punishments of their parents and teachers. In a school where most of the scholars are moral, obedient, and diligent, new comers naturally fall into the ways of the place; they take what is called the 'tone' of the school, and grow up firmly established in good habits. The effect of good example on the character is very much like that of pure air on the health of the body; the pure moral atmosphere of a good school produces effects upon the characters of the scholars which last their lifetime. But in a bad school all this is reversed. Young children received into it pure and conscientious often become degraded and demoralised in spite of the honest endeavours of the teachers to save them.

These thoughts are perhaps difficult for the young to follow; but we may be sure that God would not have made the example of the young so powerful for good or evil, had He not meant them to feel and consider their responsibilities in the matter. It has been the aim of this lesson to set forth those responsibilities clearly. We ought to do right, because it is right, whether our deeds are seen or not, and this should be our first motive; but, at the same time, there are few thoughts which are more likely to encourage us in walking in the paths of daily duty, than the remembrance that our example tells on others, and that when we ourselves walk in the right way we are helping those around us to do the same.

Let us close the lesson with one more illustration. Drop a pebble into a pond of still water and watch what happens. At first some little waves rise round the point where the pebble falls; these waves make others on all sides of them, till at length the ripple noiselessly extends far over the surface of the pond. So it is with our examples. Their influence noiselessly extends for good or evil, we know not how far, over the surface of human life.

LESSON 182.

Read St. Luke xix. 12—27.

Health.

WE considered in our last lesson one special subject, as an illustration of the parable of the Pieces of Money. We will now consider another, namely, the *Gift of Health*.

The laws of England punish attempts to commit suicide, and provide that the body of anyone who, in the full possession of his reason, succeeds in such an attempt, shall not be buried in consecrated ground. Our ancestors, who made these laws, considered that life is the gift of God, and that we ought never willingly to part with it, except in His service. Even some of the old heathens had a religious objection to suicide: for instance, Pythagoras, the oldest of Greek philosophers, compares a person who voluntarily destroys his own life, to a soldier, who, without his captain's command, leaves a post he has been set to guard.

But it is strange that though life has been thus regarded, men have been very slow to see that health is equally a gift of God, and that it is often as necessary as life itself to enable us to do the work He appoints us. The blindness of the mass of men on this point is shown by a very common and stupid saying, before referred to. We hear people say of a man who is ruining his health by some folly or sin, that 'he is nobody's enemy but his own;' as though our welfare were not so bound up with that of others in this world, that no man can be 'his own enemy' without doing harm also to others.

Let us then consider the consequences to others of recklessness as to our own health. In the first place, if we do not bring on immediate illness, or early death, by imprudence in youth, we undermine our constitutions and shorten our lives: we must also bear in mind, that it is the term of our later life which we thus shorten; that is to say, just the portion of life which our ripened knowledge ought to have made most useful to those around us. *So long as a man's health of mind and body lasts, he becomes more useful, generally speaking, the older he grows, because his knowledge of and experience in his particular calling are always increasing.*

Let us take an illustration from real life. Some years ago there lived in this country a physician of great talents. God had given him the quick observation and other faculties which go to make a very first-rate physician. He had every advantage which a good education could give him, and was moreover fond of and zealous in his profession. But he was also fond of pleasure; he lived fast, that is, he spent his strength freely in mere passing enjoyments. In early middle life he was laid up with a bad illness, the result of his youthful excesses; he had to leave England, and give up his profession. On one occasion he said, in the bitterness of his heart, 'What makes me so wretched is that I have had to abandon my profession just when I thoroughly knew it.' Not long after saying this, he used his art to put a painless end to his life by poison. What a lesson does this unhappy fate teach us! Here was a man specially fitted by his talents and education to heal infirmities and lessen human suffering, who was forced by his early imprudences to leave the work of his life just when he was best able to do it. The carelessness of his youth, which broke his health, may have been, and probably was, the result of thoughtlessness; but, all the same, it caused him the bitter regrets and remorse which came too late.

Next we may consider the consequences of our illness to those immediately around us. It almost always puts our friends to great expense, which often they can ill afford. How many families are distressed for months by the cost of the illness of one of its members! Many diseases also are infectious, they have a tendency to spread to others; and in this way we may greatly injure our neighbours. The consequences are sometimes most sad. For example, some years ago, a woman died of cholera in Liverpool. It was the first case in the year, and might, with proper precautions, have been kept from spreading. But the woman's friends assembled in the room in which her dead body lay, and, with all the windows shut, spent the whole night in drinking. They all took the disease from the body round which they had carried on their shocking revelry; they gave it to others; and their wretched imprudence on that night was the cause of one of the worst outbreaks of cholera ever known in the town.

In this connection we may consider what we are taught in other parts of the Bible on the subject of health. In our Old Testament lessons the importance assigned to health by the law of Moses was clearly pointed out. Let us now look at our Saviour's example. Most of His miracles, as we have seen, were miracles of healing; and He also told those whom He healed not to neglect ordinary precautions. We read a few days since of His sending ten lepers, whom He healed, to show themselves to the

priests. The purpose of their doing so was, that the priests might see that they were so thoroughly cured that they could mix in society with other men without the danger of spreading disease. In this case, our Saviour knew that the cure was complete; He had worked it miraculously; why then did He send the lepers to the priests? It was that they might set a good example, by observing strictly a law, which, though not necessary in their case, was generally useful for the health of the community. Our Saviour's scrupulous observance of this law is most striking. It shows how thoroughly we should study His example in matters great or small. It tells us that He regarded health as one of man's greatest blessings, and that if we mean to preserve it, we must observe those laws on which it depends.

It is impossible in these lessons to enter into the details of the laws of health, or to give definite rules for its preservation. But we may just, in passing, make some remarks upon one of the surest ways of destroying health, that is, indulgence in the sin of gluttony or of drunkenness. Let us hear what St. Paul says of temperance. 'Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.' He refers here to the practice of those who go into training for a race: they take the utmost care of their health, that they may bring their strength to the highest point, and the Apostle argues that if people deny themselves, and live so temperately, to obtain earthly prizes and rewards, much more ought we to take the same care to enable us to do our life's work in such a way as to obtain the approval of God.¹

NOTE.—The *same* word is used in the original Greek of the New Testament for 'health' and 'salvation'; indeed, in some passages it is impossible (except by the context, and difficult with its help) to determine whether 'health' or 'salvation' is the more appropriate rendering; that is to say, whether soundness of body or soundness of soul was foremost in the mind of the writer.

¹ I am well aware that it will not be easy to make this lesson clear to the young. But I think that with care it may be done. It is of the highest importance, especially with scholars of the artizan class, to get some ideas into their minds as to the

value of health. Only persons who have been brought into close intercourse with the labouring classes can be aware of their marvellous recklessness in this matter, and of all the evils it entails.

LESSON 183.

Read St. Luke **xix.** 28—48.

WE have come now to the end of the journey, the incidents of which we have lately been considering. With the arrival of our Saviour at Jerusalem, the history of the plot against His life begins.

The way in which He was welcomed by the multitudes did not appear to be an indication of danger, but really, even in the enthusiasm of the people, there was great danger. As soon as they found that He was acting in a manner different from what they had expected, they turned against Him, and within six days He became an object of their bitter hatred. The day of the entry into Jerusalem is still observed by us under the name of Palm Sunday, the first day of the week in which Good Friday occurs.

This account of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is made much easier to understand by descriptions which have been given us by travellers of the road by which He travelled. From the highest part of the road, as it crosses the Mount of Olives, a glimpse, but only a glimpse, is caught of the city. It was here, it is supposed, that the cry was raised, 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.' After passing this highest point¹ the road dips into a kind of hollow, and the travellers journey some distance without a sight of Jerusalem. Then there comes another slight ascent, and at its summit the whole city bursts upon the view, separated from the traveller only by a narrow but deep valley. Here it was, that, *coming near*, Jesus 'beheld the city and wept over it,' breaking out into the pathetic lamentation, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the dust, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.' We shall be the better able to understand all the meaning of this exclamation, if we look forward a little and refer now to the events of which it was clearly a prophecy.

Nearly forty years after this entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the Jews rebelled against the Roman power, and tried to regain their old independence. The Roman armies were at once reinforced,

¹ Dean Stanley was, I believe, the first to point out the exact correspondence between this peculiarity in the configuration of the ground and

the narrative which St. Luke gives with such detail. See 'Sinai and Palestine,' ch. iii.

and a terrible vengeance was taken upon the rebellious Jews. At many cities in other parts of Palestine there were scenes of dreadful bloodshed, but still the chief men among the Jews clung to the belief that their beautiful city Jerusalem would be able to maintain its resistance. At last, however, the Roman troops surrounded the city, and prevented any coming out or going in. This investment took place at a time when the city was more crowded than usual, as the people had collected there to celebrate one of their religious feasts. The natural consequence followed; all the provisions were rapidly consumed, and then began the horrors of famine. People who had been accustomed to live in luxury were reduced to starving, or to eating the most loathsome food. It is said that some persons actually fought with the dogs for scraps of offal. One most horrible story is told of a mother cooking and eating her own child. These horrors were not lessened by love and harmony among those who endured them; on the contrary, the quarrels among different parties or factions of the Jews were almost as destructive as the assaults of the Romans. At length the city was taken; the Temple was burnt, more than one million Jews were killed, and the remainder made slaves or dispersed through foreign lands. Still the Jews were not destroyed; even now they survive in nearly all parts of the world, but their history from that time almost to the present day is a history of persecution and humiliation. There is scarcely a country in Europe in which Jews have not been cruelly treated. In England, in the Middle Ages, it was a common practice for kings who wanted money to demand it from the Jews, and to enforce the demand by inhuman tortures. In addition to these sufferings, the Jews have had to endure the contempt of all those among whom they have dwelt.

The entry of Christ into Jerusalem, when taken in connection with the events which followed it, is therefore most touching, as affording another illustration of the tenderness of our Saviour's love. We see Him entering the fated city, wholly unmindful of what His own sufferings were to be, but filled with sorrow for the coming affliction of His fellow-countrymen. The scene is also full of warning to all of us, for we may be sure that suffering will befall individuals as well as nations, if, like Jerusalem, they 'know not the time of their visitation.' The Lord's 'visitation' comes to us in various ways. It comes to us when, by the loss of some very dear relation or friend, the sad side of this life and the uncertainty of all earthly happiness is brought home to us; it comes to us at times when the thrill of some great joy or love reveals to us the depth and strength of the nobler faculties of our human nature; it comes to us in our moments of penitence, when we have committed some sin which has awakened us to the fact that our thoughts have

long been wandering from God ; it comes to us when some religious truth, often heard before, is borne in upon our minds with a fresh and mysterious force which we cannot explain. On all these and other like occasions we hear God's messages of the kind here spoken of as a visitation, and the Bible, in this chapter, as in the parable of the Great Supper, warns us solemnly of the dangers of trifling with them.

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LESSON 184.

Read St. Luke xx.

THIS chapter contains accounts of our Lord's teaching in the Temple, and of the attempts made by His enemies to find a ground of accusation against Him, on one of the days of the last week of His life.

In two instances we find Him repelling His enemies by putting to them questions which they could not answer without confessing that their only design had been to perplex and harass Him. The cavilling question put by the Pharisees and Herodians in concert, drew from our Saviour a very distinct direction to us to be careful to draw a line between the obedience due to the State, or civil authorities, and the obedience due to the voice of religion and conscience. This is what is meant by 'rendering to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's.' Our Saviour does not tell us how we are to draw the line in all cases. He could not have done so without going into minute and long explanations unlike all His other teaching ; but right-minded men, not unduly given to self-assertion, have seldom felt much practical difficulty in applying this saying of our Lord to the affairs of real life.

The discussion with the Sadducees, who denied a future life, is the first occasion on which we read of any controversy upon this point. Our Lord had implied, if He had not directly taught, the doctrine of immortality, but up to this time the Sadducees had never put themselves forward as His opponents. It is possible that these particular Sadducees felt the weariness of life without this great hope, and sought from Jesus some argument which would help them to believe in a life to come. Whether they felt this weariness or not, there is no doubt that as we grow older, and are brought face to face with the trials and disappointments of life, a firm faith in the resurrection of man becomes not only a necessity for our happiness, but a source of strength and comfort to us in our daily work.

Let us take a striking example, that of St. Paul, the great Apostle of whom we shall read in the Acts. His life was beset with many trials. Fearlessly following the truth as it was revealed

to him, he had in mature life become a Christian, thus breaking off, not without much pain, the ties, associations, and friendships of his past life. After his conversion he underwent many persecutions, and had the bitter disappointment of seeing many of those for whose sake he had suffered them sliding back into the paths of sin. But all his trials were cheerfully borne in the hope of a future life; how completely his strength and happiness depended upon that hope is clear from his own words in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv. 19, 32): 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable;' and again, 'If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' The fervency of his hopes, and their spiritual nature, are made manifest by what he says in the Second Epistle to the same Church (2 Cor. iv. 17—v. 1): 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

On the other hand, nothing can be more sad than some of the writings of the ancient heathens who did not believe in a future state. They abound with arguments and maxims intended to reconcile men to death, the very number of which serves to show how heavily the thought of it daily pressed upon them.

How, then, can we gain a firm hold upon this important truth? Our Saviour's words to the Jews who asked for proofs of His divine authority answer the question: 'If any man will do the will of my Father, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' These words mean that the great comfort and happiness which arise from a confident trust in God's promises, are the reward of obedience to His precepts. The worldly-minded, those who are sunk in selfishness, and who live only for themselves, may and often do try to trust in the promise of a future state, but their trust is at best a faint one, under which lurks disquieting, though often unconfessed, doubt. On the other hand, there are many persons whose belief in a future life is as real and certain as their belief in the existence of the countries of this world, which they have read of, but have never seen. To them death is not only not dreadful, but is looked forward to as a happy change. Like St. Paul, they desire 'to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.' But they are always persons who have lived in the daily remembrance of the unseen world, to whom it has been a source of daily strength in all

the work of life, who have discharged duties both great and small as in God's sight, and who have therefore, even here below, begun to taste the joys of the world to come. All this is implied in our Lord's words, 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him.'

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Read St. Luke xxi.

THIS chapter continues the history of the last week of our Lord's life, and contains an account of warnings which He gave to His disciples concerning the approaching destruction of Jerusalem. They had had so much experience of His wisdom and foreknowledge that they believed that what He foretold would happen, but they wished to have some sign given them by which they might know the *exact* time of the dreadful event. He refused to give them any. The subsequent experience of mankind shows the wisdom of His refusal. When men are led to expect certain signs of the occurrence of great events, they are apt to get into a state of feverish excitement. In that state they neglect the ordinary duties of life, always waiting for the great event, which, they think, is to give them new duties. Between the utterance of our Lord's prediction and its fulfilment, the Jews as a nation did get into this state. Again and again, after the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, men arose calling themselves the Messiah, and leading their fellow-countrymen into useless rebellions, for which they were terribly punished by the authorities of the Roman Empire. From these dangers the disciples of our Saviour were protected by obedience to His counsels. He had told them to be quiet and undisturbed, and to do every day's duties patiently for His sake.

This chapter is believed by many persons to be a prediction, not only of the trials which would accompany the fall of the Jewish nation, but also of the end of the world. If this opinion be true, still our wisest plan is not vainly to attempt to find out *when* that will be, but 'to possess our souls in patience,' that is, to be ready whenever the last day may come. The 'last day,' that will certainly come to each of us, is the day of death, and we can only fit ourselves for it by spending every day of our lives in the fear of God and in obedience to His commandments.

Having taken a general survey of the chapter, let us go back and consider in detail the occasion which gave rise to the discourse. It was an answer to a remark made by the disciples on the beauty of the Temple buildings, in which they had been sitting. While they were there, many persons came and placed their gifts in the Treasury, or box fixed in the Temple for the purpose of receiving offerings in money from the worshippers. Rich men made large

offerings, and then came a poor widow, who put into the box two mites—that is, two of the smallest coins current in Palestine. Our Lord's remarks upon this act teach us that God values our gifts according to the self-denial we exercise in bestowing them, and not at all according to the largeness of the gifts themselves. The value of the two mites was very small; but the widow had but few of them, and could not give even one without depriving herself of some things which she really wanted. The rich, on the contrary, were in no way pinched by the loss of what out of their abundance they cast into the treasury. The deep meaning of the saying, 'She hath cast in more than they all,' grows clearer and clearer to us, the more we consider the effects produced on mankind by different kinds of gifts. On the one hand we see that gifts which are made at the cost of much trouble and self-denial to the givers, soften and raise those who receive them, by means of the gratitude and love which they call forth, and thus possess a religious and moral value which often far exceeds any other good they do. On the other hand, lavish gifts, if made carelessly and thoughtlessly, too often degrade the receivers, and do more harm than good.

Let us take some illustrations. The first from real life:—

A woman who in her youth had lived a very vicious life, and in her old age showed no penitence for her sin, and who was consequently looked upon by her neighbours as a very bad, hardened old woman, fell ill. One of her neighbours, also a poor old woman, went to nurse and take care of her. This poor neighbour was a silent, and rather reserved woman. She talked very little about religion, but she read her Bible regularly, and showed how well she understood its teaching, by doing many a kind act for those around her, in a quiet, unnoticed way. While she was watching the sick woman she offered to read the Bible to her, but the offer was refused. This, however, made no difference in the kindness with which the nurse watched over the invalid through long, weary nights, and pinched herself to buy comforts for her stricken neighbour. One day, when the sick woman was recovering, she turned to her friend, and, pointing to the Bible, said, 'Read me some of that book you love so much.' From that time she gradually became a changed woman. Kindness and self-denial, on the part of a neighbour as poor and as generous as the widow who gave her mites, had not only healed the body, but had awakened admiration and gratitude, and thus softened the heart and opened it at last to the light of the Gospel. They had done for the old woman what the many tracts and lectures which had been lavishly bestowed upon her had utterly failed to accomplish.

Now let us turn to another picture, that of the household of

a rich, careless spendthrift. He is too often spoken of as a fine, generous fellow, whereas in reality he is merely very weak, very thoughtless, or very vain. He shuts his eyes to the dishonesty which his carelessness fosters in those around him, lest in checking it he should be troubled, or exposed to the charge of meanness. His wealth corrupts instead of blessing all who come into contact with him. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that by large or frequent ill-considered gifts we can get rid of the responsibilities which God has attached to the possession of riches. The miser is more generally condemned by man than the free, careless giver, but in the sight of God the sin of both is precisely of the same kind. Both are living for selfish ends, and misusing God's gifts; but of the two, the miser really does far less harm. It may at least be said of him that he has only wrapped his gift in a napkin, while the spendthrift has employed his in such a way as to corrupt and degrade his fellow-men.

As a rule, subject of course to some exceptions, the good which people can accomplish in this world by means of gifts is very nearly measured by the amount of trouble and self-denial which they are prepared themselves to go through. This rule applies to rich people very much more than we are at first ready to believe.

Few of us, perhaps, are rich enough to be able to do much harm by the reckless throwing about of our money, but we may all do harm by joining in the chorus of praise bestowed too often upon the mis-called liberality of the careless spendthrift; and on the other hand, we may do much good by *giving away whatever we can spare in a conscientious, systematic, and self-denying manner.*

NOTE.—I hope that teachers will endeavour to impress all their scholars, whether they belong to the richer or poorer parts of the community, with a sense of the importance of the proper use of money. The generally-received standard of moral responsibility among us on this subject is certainly lamentably low. It is very common to hear men of moderate means, who give liberally to well-considered objects, sneered at as mean and stingy, merely because they are, on principle, very *exact* and *careful* in their daily expenditure. By the rich a systematic expenditure, at once frugal and liberal in the best sense of those words, is most rarely practised, and when it is practised is very generally condemned. The reckless and mischievous throwing about of money is, however, by no means confined to the very wealthy. Take as an instance the history of fees to railway porters. The railway companies did their best to prevent the practice, fearing that it would lead to the neglect of the poorer class of travellers by the servants of the companies. But, so far from being supported by the public in this praiseworthy effort, they were met by determined opposition and

evasion of their rules. The custom prevailed of offering fees to porters, *who could only accept them by disobeying the instructions of their employers, and violating the conditions of their engagement.* The companies had at last to abandon an effort made purely in the public interest, and frustrated by the selfish, careless misuse of money.

Again, what can be sadder than to see the demoralisation which almost always takes place in a poor part of the country when it first becomes the resort of tourists and strangers? The people who before had been fair and honest, become extortionate and cheating, and the children are encouraged to become lazy little beggars; and all this is due to the reckless misuse of money. It is therefore desirable to awaken the young who are likely to be well-off to a sense of their coming responsibilities, and to influence public opinion generally to form a juster estimate of the way in which those responsibilities should be discharged.

LESSON 186.

Read St. Luke xxii. 1—38.

THIS passage shows us two kinds of preparation for the day of our Lord's death. First it tells us of the preparation made by His old enemies, the priests and scribes, and by His faithless follower, Judas Iscariot, who made an agreement with the priests to betray Him, or give Him up secretly into their hands. The writers of the four Gospels make no attempt to explain the conduct of Judas, or to estimate the heinousness of his sin; we may be content to dismiss the subject as briefly as they do.

But upon the second preparation, that which our Saviour and His faithful disciples made, we must dwell long and often. The account which we have just read of the Last Supper is so simply and beautifully given, that anyone who meditates upon it aright cannot fail to be moved by its influence, and to enter into its deep and sacred meaning. Our Saviour was about to part from His disciples, the time of their joint work was about to close, and He was soon to leave them in the world to carry it on, exposed to the trials, temptations, and persecutions which He foresaw. It was at this solemn moment that He gave the invitation, not only to the disciples who were then around Him, but to all of us who may be His true followers, to join in the rite which He then instituted, and which is known to all Christians as the Communion, or celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The name 'Communion,' applied to this rite, has a very beautiful meaning. The word means sharing or taking part of something common to all the partakers. It thus expresses two

privileges which belong to sincere followers of Christ; first, union with Him, entering into His mind and becoming like Him, and secondly, union with one another, and, as a necessary result, mutual love and strength. The symbol chosen by our Saviour to teach these truths is a very expressive one: those who join in the Communion are all, as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, partakers of the 'one bread.' It was, as it seems, the same loaf which was broken and shared among the disciples, and the same cup which was passed round to all, that each might drink the wine. What a rebuke the very action conveys to those who, like the disciples, dispute with one another who shall be the greatest!

Now let us consider the words in which Christ invites us to take part in this celebration. He says, 'This do, in remembrance of Me.' In one sense we may say the very name of the ordinance is a perpetual remembrance of Him. It is simply because He instituted it, and commanded it to be continued, that we still call it the Lord's Supper. But this is not all that we have to consider. The question is, 'How does our Saviour wish to be remembered?' We can best answer this important question in His own words: 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' Here we are told very plainly what form our loving remembrance of Him must take, if it is to be acceptable to Him. It must be love manifesting itself in obedience. Love without obedience He does not value, for He knows well that such love cannot be real, disinterested, and sincere.

If, therefore, we desire to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we must, before the solemn occasions, when it is celebrated, examine our own lives by the rule of God's precepts, and see how far we are living in harmony with Christ's example and teaching, so that we may come away from the celebration with a full sense of our own shortcomings, and at the same time strengthened and refreshed by God's grace in our attempts to overcome them. Most especially must we examine ourselves as to our feelings and actions towards our fellow-men; for if we partake of the Communion, which is a sign of mutual love, with hearts full of unkind thoughts towards others, with hard, unforgiving spirits, or without sincere sorrow for any real injury which we may have done to others, we only desecrate sacred things, and cannot be partakers in the blessings and privileges of which the Communion is a symbol. St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, speaks in very severe language of those persons who take the Communion in an unworthy manner or spirit; and it is in order to give Christians time to think very seriously of the meaning of this sacred rite before they join in celebrating it, that very young children are not allowed to do so.

NOTE.—The terrible words of the 21st and 22nd verses seem

to show that Judas, who had previously made all his arrangements for the betrayal of our Saviour, was among those who first partook of the Lord's Supper. Opinion is divided on this point: but the connection of the verses in this chapter may be made to furnish a very solemn warning to elder scholars (for whom, indeed, this whole lesson is mainly intended) that the mere eating of the bread and drinking of the wine cannot do good, and must do harm, to those who do not devoutly join with their whole hearts in the celebration.

LESSON 187.

Read St. Luke xxii. 39—71.

THE time spent by our Saviour with His disciples in the upper room, during which, as we read in our last lesson, He instituted that rite which we call the Lord's Supper, was the last time of peace and rest before His crucifixion. They went out together, the disciples and their Master, to the Mount of Olives. St. Luke's account is brief, but we may supply additional details from the other Evangelists. There was a place on the slope of the Mount of Olives, described as a garden, and known by the name of Gethsemane, to which it was our Lord's habit to retire, when He was at Jerusalem, for private prayer. To this place it was that they now went. When they were within the enclosure, Jesus separated the three, Peter, James, and John, and took them apart with Himself. To all He said, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' After a while He left even the three chosen ones, and departed from them about a stone's cast, where He knelt and uttered the memorable prayer, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' All the anguish He was then enduring, all that He knew the next day would bring with it, could not bend His resolution. He was ready to suffer, as He had been ready to do, all things appointed for Him by His Father. The older we grow, the more sorrow and the more pain shall we, in all probability, have to endure, and the more deeply shall we feel that there is nothing which can help us to bear up under suffering but the entire resignation expressed in the words of our Saviour's prayer, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.'

We may notice in passing that our Lord, even at this supreme moment, longed for human sympathy, and that the three disciples who had lost some of the glory of His Transfiguration by their falling asleep, lost, from the same cause, an opportunity of supporting and comforting their Master.

The other Evangelists tell us that when Jesus, after His agony, came back to His disciples, He used the words, 'The hour is at hand.' As He spoke, Judas, with the soldiers of the high priests,

entered the garden, and advanced to Jesus to kiss Him. That was the sign agreed upon between Judas and his allies. The soldiers took Jesus, and led Him away to the palace of the high priest, within the walls of Jerusalem. His own danger did not prevent His being mindful of, and loving towards, others. First he healed the ear of the servant whom one of His disciples had wounded, and, secondly, as St. John tells us, He made intercession for His followers with the leader of the band of His captors: 'If ye seek Me,' He said, 'let these go their way.'

Now comes one of the saddest stories in the whole Bible, the story of St. Peter's denial of our Lord. Earlier in that night St. Peter had declared that he was ready to go to prison and to death with his Lord; but Jesus had warned him of the danger of such confident speaking. We know that St. Peter loved his Master, and we may quite readily believe that when he spoke of suffering death, he meant what he said. But his boldness was unfortunately the result of self-confidence rather than of self-control, and such boldness very often fails in the hour of trial. When he saw the fierce crowd surrounding his Master, and heard their bitter words, he thought that he himself was in danger. Under the pressure of this thought he imagined that it would be safer to deny all knowledge of Jesus, and so, at the hour of the Lord's greatest need, he, who a few hours ago had been so bold, proved a very coward. His inclination, doubtless, was right, but timidity was as hurtful to him as a downright evil inclination could have been. Three times he denied all knowledge of Jesus. The crowing of the cock at dawn seems of itself to have had no effect upon him, but 'the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.' There are looks which express far more than any words can do, and such a look was that of our Lord. Instantly there came to St. Peter's mind a full remembrance of his bold words, and a full sense of his ingratitude and sin; he went out and wept bitterly. That St. Peter's remorse did not end in remorse only, but led to sincere and manly repentance, we may be sure from his after conduct, of which we shall read in the Acts of the Apostles. At present we can consider only his denial of our Saviour, and draw from it one lesson. If a man whose love was so great, whose desires were so upright, as St. Peter's were, could be surprised into such a sin through want of self-control, how careful ought we to be, how deeply we should ponder over and lay to heart St. Paul's words, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!'

LESSON 188.

Read St. Luke xxiii.

In this chapter we have read an account of the trial, condemnation, and death of our Lord. The narrative is so touching and so simple that very few remarks need be made upon it. It is rather something to be read and thought over quietly and solemnly, than to be commented upon. But, in order that our thoughts may be directed to the main points, let us consider one or two of them.

The scene before the judgment-seat of Pontius Pilate brings out one truth which is among the most momentous truths of life. We never can know what may be the consequences of a sin. If we depart from the plain path of right, we cannot foresee to what evils our wanderings may lead. From what we learn from other parts of the Gospels, and especially from our Saviour's prayer on the cross, it is clear that the Jews who appeared as the accusers of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, did not know that He was the Messiah, the promised Saviour of mankind. Many of them only knew Him to be a man who was teaching doctrines opposed, not merely to their feelings and wishes, but also to many of the religious ideas in which they had been educated. But all of them certainly knew that it was wrong to accuse Him of having made Himself a rival of Cæsar, when the statement was untrue. They knew that it was wrong to bear false witness against any man. By bearing false witness against Jesus, they were unconsciously supplying the last link which was to connect the long chain of past events in their history with its culminating disasters, the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of their race. It has been said that we cannot foresee the consequences of our sins: this statement may be made much wider. We are unable to foresee all the consequences of any of our acts; but, if we do our best to obey God's precepts, the responsibility for those acts rests solely with God who is All-wise and All-powerful; whereas, if we wander from the path of His commandments, we assume for ourselves, as the Jews did on this occasion, all the responsibility for what we do.

The second special point which we must notice is the patience and love displayed by our Saviour all through His trial and suffering. Even when the rough soldiers had nailed Him to the cross, His thoughts towards them were thoughts of love and justice. He prayed for His murderers, saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' Surely this great example ought to make us ashamed of the angry spirit which we too often cherish towards those who have wronged us in but small matters.

But now let us consider the lesson of the whole account of our Saviour's sufferings and death. The most touching comments on His life, as well as His death and resurrection, are to be found in the lives of His faithful followers. We learn from them what deep, inspiring love for God and man, what noble courage, what heroic self-control, what bright and certain hopes of immortality have been established in those persons who have entered fully into the Christian faith. We shall read in the Acts of the Apostles of the sufferings and devotion of Christ's immediate followers, and we shall close this course of lessons with some account of the sufferings of the other early Christians. Their examples cannot fail to strengthen us, and we may be helped to value the Gospel the more when we know through what dangers and agonies our fellow-Christians passed, in order to preserve its light for us. But, as a modern writer well says, 'All lesser examples and lives will for ever hold a subordinate place, and serve chiefly to reflect light on the central and original Example. In His wounds all human sorrows will hide themselves, and all human self-denials support themselves against His cross.'

As to the deep meaning of that last scene upon the cross, we learn it from many passages of Scripture. The prophet Isaiah, in one of the most significant of such passages, says:—'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed' (Isaiah liii. 3-5). And St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, expresses still more forcibly our *personal* concern in the great event of which we have been reading. He says: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me' (Galatians ii. 20).

NOTE.—It seemed inadvisable to introduce into the body of this lesson any details as to the nature of the punishment of crucifixion, or the legal relations between Jews and Romans illustrated by our Saviour's trial and execution. I therefore add here two remarks. (i.) The punishment of crucifixion was essentially a *Roman* punishment, and was inflicted by the Romans only on persons who had no standing as citizens. Had our Saviour been condemned by *Jews*, the punishment would have been stoning; in that case, all that Pilate would have been required to do would have been to *ratify* the sentence and allow it to be executed. (ii.) The charge

on which our Lord was actually condemned was a charge of treason against the Roman Emperor. The Jewish authorities renounced not Jesus only, but all their hopes of a Messiah, when they cried, 'We have no king but Cæsar.'

LESSON 189.
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Read St. Luke xxiv.

THIS chapter tells us of the triumph which followed the apparent defeat and failure of our Saviour's mission. It tells us how, after His crucifixion, He rose again from the dead, and showed Himself to His disciples. From this point onwards in the New Testament two subjects are always spoken of in close connection with each other, namely, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the Saviour. This is the highest and most perfect example of a truth which we have had brought before us more than once before, namely, that what we at first suppose to be failure is very often the preparation, and, so far as we can see afterwards, the necessary condition for true and lasting success. We shall find, in reading the Acts of the Apostles, how great was the influence which our Lord's Resurrection had upon the minds and hearts of His followers. At present we may very profitably collect a few of the passages in the Epistles, in which defeat and glory are spoken of as manifested in the death and resurrection of our Saviour.

In the Epistle to the Philippians (ii. 8, 9, 10) St. Paul says of our Lord: 'He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at (or *in*) the name of Jesus every knee should bow.'

In the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 9) the apostle says, 'We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.'

Very striking also are the passages, too numerous to be quoted at full length, in which the same contrast is set before us as a model of the way in which we should die to sin, and rise to a new life. As specimens we may take Romans viii. 11, Colossians iii. 1:—

'If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.'

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'

Now we have been so long accustomed to the kind of teaching which these passages contain, that we find it difficult to realise the mental condition of the first disciples of Jesus when it was

told them that He was alive. The good news was too good to be credited: the words of the women, we are told, seemed to the apostles 'as idle tales.' But when they had seen and spoken with their Lord after His Resurrection, they learnt that it was just what they ought to have expected. We have seen in our earlier lessons that the notion which the disciples, in common with the rest of the Jews, had formed of the Messiah, was the notion of a mighty conqueror. Our Lord's words to the two disciples who were on the way to Emmaus show us that the notion was only half true. The early Scriptures had spoken of a conquering Messiah, but also of a suffering Messiah. The suffering was to come first, as He said, It was meet for the Messiah 'to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory.' In the same sense St. Peter speaks in his first epistle, telling us that the ancient prophets, under the influence of God's Spirit, 'testified beforehand the sufferings of (the) Christ, and the glory that should follow.'

What that glory is we all know. It is shown in the life of every faithful Christian. The dominion of Christ over men's souls is wider than any earthly empire ever could have been, and as enduring as time itself.

One illustration of the way in which this great event has affected men's minds in even common things, may be found in the change in the use of one common symbol, the cross. It was a sign of the deepest disgrace; the mark of a cross was sometimes branded on slaves of notoriously bad character. Now the cross is held to be a symbol of honour: many of the signs of the highest honours which kings can confer upon their subjects are crosses.

St. Luke's Gospel closes with a very brief account of our Saviour's departure from His disciples. He was no more to be with them in bodily presence, but in remembrance of His words and deeds, and in humble, faithful imitation of His great example, they were to go forth and to preach to all nations, in His name, the duty of repentance and the privilege of pardon, or, in one well-known word, the Gospel.

LESSON 190.

Read St. John **xx.** 19—29.

OUR last lesson brought us to the end of St. Luke's Gospel, but before we proceed to read the Acts of the Apostles, we will take one lesson from St. John's Gospel, which will show us more clearly than anything else can do the immediate effect of the Resurrection upon the minds of the disciples. St. Luke does not give us the history of the two appearances of which we have just read, but he does seem to refer to one of them in the 39th verse

of his last chapter. He tells us there that Jesus, on one occasion after His Resurrection, said to His disciples, 'Behold *My hands and My feet* that it is I Myself: *handle Me*, and see.'

The appearance of our Lord to His disciples gave them great joy: 'Then were the disciples glad, when they had seen the Lord.' But St. Thomas was not with them, and when he heard from them an account of the events which had occurred in his absence, he would not believe. He said, moreover, that nothing short of actually touching the marks left in Christ's body by the nails and the spear, would convince him of the truth of the Resurrection.

The reappearances of our Saviour to His followers, after He had been crucified and had risen again from the dead, were, doubtless, intended to strengthen their faith in all His promises, and to deepen their conviction of the truth of all His teaching, as well as to widen and confirm their hopes of immortality. Yet we must be careful to observe that in His words to St. Thomas—'Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed'—He tells us that the divine character of His ministry and authority does not rest alone on these miraculous reappearances, or indeed, on any single proof. The divine character of our Lord's coming is to be proved in many ways, as, before His crucifixion, He Himself repeatedly declared. Many of these proofs appeal not to the senses but to the heart, the evidence of which is much higher and more certain in character than that of the senses. The words, 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,' are the more important to us because we may be partakers of the blessedness they declare. More than eighteen centuries have passed away since our Lord's last appearance on this earth, and we could not, if we would, have the evidence of sight and touch which Thomas desired to have. But we still may have the strength of soul and the consolation which belief in Christ can give: for His example and His teaching alike appeal to the spirit of faith which God has imparted to us all, and which, as we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is truly 'the evidence of things unseen.'

This lesson closes the Life of Christ; the remainder of our course will show how that Life, remembered and followed, was a constant, active source of strength, comfort, and wisdom to His followers.

LESSON 191.

Read Acts i.

THE Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of the history which we have read in St. Luke's Gospel, and by the same writer. 'The former treatise,' referred to at the beginning of this first chapter, can be no other than the Gospel of St. Luke. But there is one difference between the two books which will strike us; the former is more regularly arranged, and gives a more connected history than the latter. The reason for such a difference is clear. In the Gospel, one Person is the subject of the whole narrative. We read only of the disciples in their connection with the Master: to have brought them into prominence would have been to call away the attention of the reader from Him to whom alone they owe all their importance. In the Acts the case is different: the purpose of the book is to show how, after His departure, the followers of Jesus obeyed His commands. We must not, however, expect to find detailed accounts of the work of all the apostles; what St. Luke here gives us is a collection of typical events, showing how the new faith was spread, rather than a minute history of its reception in every place. This difference must be noticed; and yet it must be added that, in a very true sense, the *subject* of the Acts is the same as that of the Gospel: it is still Christ that we read about; only in the Gospel we read of His life, in the Acts we read of the power of His example, and of the influence of His Spirit upon mankind.

These general remarks apply to the whole book; now let us turn to the special subject of this lesson.

The one thing upon which we must here fix our attention is the great and wonderful change which came over the disciples after the resurrection, and ascension of our Lord. In the Gospels we read that when Jesus was seized by the servants of the priests, His disciples 'forsook Him and fled.' From this fact, and from others told us in the Gospels, we see that before the resurrection the disciples were prone to give way to alarms and hopelessness. But from one end of the Acts to the other we read of no such weakness; on the contrary, the disciples seem to have been filled with faith, hope, and courage. This change was, no doubt, furthered by the events of which we shall read in the next chapter, but in this we see that it had certainly commenced before they took place. We see this very clearly from St. Peter's speech to his fellow-apostles, in which he explained to them that the loss of their beloved Lord was in exact fulfilment of God's purposes. The disciples, far from being cast down or giving way to despair,

at once began to make arrangements for carrying on His work. The means they took for filling up the place of the traitor Judas show their simple faith that although their Lord had gone away from them, they were far from being deserted or engaged in a hopeless task; that, on the contrary, they were under the direct guidance of God. The experience they had so lately had of the fierce hatred and opposition of the rulers to the teaching and work of their Master alarmed them no longer, for they knew themselves to be under Divine protection. He had spoken of the work of preaching His Gospel, which was to begin at Jerusalem, but was to be extended all over the world; they were not appalled at the greatness of the undertaking, for they remembered His last words to them, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' From this great change in the faith of the disciples we learn two truths, the significance of which we cannot exaggerate.

First, the change referred to is itself the strongest conceivable proof of the deep and honest belief of the first disciples in the truth of the events they have recorded. In this way, and to this extent, it furnishes us with what is generally called an evidence of Christianity.

Secondly, we see from their changed state of feeling what hopefulness, strength, and courage we might derive from the events recorded in the close of the Gospels—Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—if we could only take them really to heart, as did the first disciples.

LESSON 192.

Read Acts ii.

In this chapter we read of the fulfilment of the promise made by our Saviour to His disciples immediately before His departure from them. He had given them a work to do which would require more than human power for its accomplishment, and had told them that they should receive power when the Holy Ghost was come upon them. From the Gospel of St. John we learn one purpose of the bestowal of the Holy Ghost. There were many sayings of the Saviour, which, though they were of great importance, the disciples were likely to forget; Christ told them that the Holy Ghost should bring all things to their remembrance. There were others which we are expressly told in the Gospels the disciples did not understand; Christ promised that when the Holy Ghost was given, He should guide them into all truth. Thus the gift of the Holy Ghost which this chapter records was like the pouring of a flood of light upon the minds of the disciples; it enabled them to remember their Master's words, and to see how their deep spiritual meaning was to be brought

out; it enabled them also to understand the significance of His life, death, and resurrection, and by that understanding to apply the principles involved in the facts to their great work, the conversion of the world.

This is what the gift of the Holy Ghost was to the first disciples; what is it to us? That we have an interest in it, is clear from the promise that the Holy Ghost should 'abide for ever' with Christ's followers. We, as well as the first disciples, need to be strengthened, instructed, and guided into truth. These needs it is the office of God's Holy Spirit to supply, and we may all receive the aid of that Holy Spirit, if we pray for it earnestly and faithfully. It will come to us, not as it came to the disciples, but as the 'still, small voice' which came to Elijah. A beautiful hymn expresses so well the influence of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts, that we will quote it here:—

'Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender, last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter bequeathed,
With us to dwell.

He came sweet influence to impart,
A gracious, willing guest,
While He can find one humble heart
Wherein to rest.

And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

And every virtue we possess,
And every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.

Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see:
Oh make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And worthier Thee.'

The 5th verse of this chapter, as it stands in our Authorised Version, gives rather an imperfect notion of the original. We are likely to think that the Jews who are spoken of were Jews who had come from other lands, and had made Jerusalem their home. But the word translated 'dwelling,' strictly means 'staying for a short time.' They were really Jews who had come to Jerusalem only to keep the feast of Pentecost, and who, when that feast was

over, would be dispersed again. If, with this knowledge, we read St. Peter's oration, which takes up the greater part of the chapter, we cannot fail to see how admirably adapted to the occasion that speech was. The main facts of our Saviour's life and the main truths of His teaching were thus plainly set before men from all countries, and by that means something of the new faith must at once have been made known over the whole of the then civilised world, from Persia in the East to Rome in the West.

The speech itself needs little or no comment: we may, however, notice in passing that the tone of it fully justifies the remarks made in our last lesson on the change which came over the faith and boldness of the apostles. Only a few weeks before, Jesus had been crucified, and St. Peter had denied all knowledge of Him. Now the same Peter, in the midst of a crowd of enemies, declared that execution to have been a murder, and Him who was crucified to be 'Lord and Christ.'

In the previous chapter we read of the faith and hope of the infant Church; at the close of this chapter we find the members of the Church exercising, in one of its forms, another Christian virtue, namely, charity, or mutual love. The earliest Christians felt a deep common interest in all the wants, both bodily and spiritual, of their fellow-believers, and made provision for their supply. The favour with which at first they were regarded by the people, and the rapid increase of their own numbers, seem to be the natural consequences of such an exhibition of the practical character of their love for each other. We are told that it was this love which first attracted the notice of the heathen, when, as the Church extended, Christianity and heathenism came into contact. The heathen said, 'See how these Christians love one another!'

LESSON 193.

Read Acts iii.

THE account of the healing of the lame man, with which this chapter begins, is interesting as being the first detailed notice of any deed of healing performed by the apostles. It appears from hints dropped here and there in the Gospels, that the apostles, when absent from their Master, had performed some cures; these cures were accomplished in His name. Just so it was in the case of the lame man, of which we have been reading. St. Peter declared that neither he nor St. John had any power of their own to cure the man's lameness; all that they had done was to administer power bestowed on them by the Saviour. We shall read hereafter of similar acts performed by the apostles. Here, therefore, it will be well to mention, once for all, what appears to be

the most natural and most instructive way of looking at them. First, then, the accomplishment of this cure, or, any like act, by an apostle speaking in the name of Jesus, must have been a great encouragement to the whole body of believers. It must very much have deepened and strengthened the conviction, already impressed upon their minds, that the power of their Master remained with them, although they had no longer His bodily presence. In the next place, such an act must have had some effect upon those who had not received the new faith; for it must have proved to them that the apostles were really what they said they were, the followers and representatives of Jesus of Nazareth, whose public actions had been mostly of this class—that is to say, deeds which showed His love and pity in the healing of the sick and afflicted.

The second point of interest in the chapter is this: it shows us that, at first, the followers of Christ had no intention of separating themselves from the ceremonial worship of their fellow-countrymen. The new truths they had learnt from Christ were not contrary to those which had been taught centuries before, by Moses, and by the prophets; they were developments which explained the old truths, gave them deeper meaning, and impressed their practical bearing more strongly on the hearts of those who received them. The apostles of Christ must have been even more anxious than other persons to comply with much of the ceremonial worship of God in the Temple; for they had learnt, more clearly than those who had not followed Christ, that this worship was the worship of a heavenly Father, who cared for and watched over them, and whom they might thoroughly love and trust. So long as the converts to the new faith were Jews, this agreement between the ceremonial worship and Christianity lasted; it was only when, as the preachers of the Gospel went to other lands, they came into contact with Gentiles, that the idea of Christianity as a religion independent of the ceremonial forms of Judaism slowly developed itself. There were many of Christ's own disciples who never accepted this idea, and who continued to observe all the ceremonies of the Law of Moses, until, just before the final siege of Jerusalem, they quitted the city and the Temple together.

In the third place, we notice here again the boldness of the apostles. How could they have dared to stand up and accuse all the chief men of their land, as they did, of terrible injustice and murder, unless they had been thoroughly convinced of the truth of the events they asserted to have occurred, and had had the fear of their enemies cast out of their hearts by the love of their crucified and risen Lord?

LESSON 194.

Read Acts iv.

IN this chapter we read how the two apostles, St. Peter and St. John, behaved when they were brought before the Council of the Jews, commonly called the Sanhedrin. The characteristic of the apostles at that time, and indeed the characteristic word of the chapter, is 'boldness.' The narrative is simple enough; we will take our lesson to-day from the 13th verse: 'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'

It was remarked in the comment on the first chapter of this book, that the boldness of the apostles was due to their receiving fully the strengthening power of the events to which they bore witness; and their conduct is, therefore, full of instruction for all of us, and especially for those who are naturally timid and nervous.

Now, there are few snares more dangerous to well-disposed persons than natural timidity. It is in its consequences one of the saddest of all temptations, because it so often pushes people who wish to do right into wrong paths. Many a child from fear of punishment has told a lie to screen some small fault. If the first slight error had been confessed, it would have been punished, regretted, and soon forgotten; but the consequences of the deceit used to conceal it linger much longer. The deception lessens the child's self-respect far more than the original fault, and, too often, one lie leads on to another and another.¹ In later life also we are often tempted by our fears to neglect our duties, or to do things which we know we ought not to do. It is not always, or indeed most frequently, the fear of bodily harm or suffering that lead us to be deaf to the voice of our conscience. Cowardice is a temptation which comes in many ways and takes many forms. People who value very highly the sympathy and praise of their fellow-men very often have a cowardly dread of ridicule or blame. This is called moral cowardice, and is a more frequent cause of wrongdoing than the dread of bodily pain or injury. Sooner or later, most men are exposed to temptation of some kind or other arising out of timidity; all of us, therefore, must be on our guard against it. Now, in the lives of the apostles as recorded in the Acts we may learn our surest safeguards against this danger.

¹ The danger of frightening timid children into deception by hasty or too severe punishment, is one against which all persons who have to do with them should be on their guard. Children are sometimes as it were

surprised into telling lies, in cases when, if they had been more gently and deliberately interrogated, so as to give their consciences time to work, they would have told the truth.

Let us consider all the grounds which St. Peter and St. John had for being timid when thus brought before the rulers of their nation. They were, in one sense, unlearned and ignorant men, taken from the quietest part of Palestine, and they had had but little experience of the world and its ways. They were exposed to ridicule and contempt from worldly-wise men, learned in what was then, and in that land, generally considered to be the only knowledge worth having; the great council, before which they were brought, was a body of men for whom from their childhood they had been taught to have the greatest veneration. When they were fishermen, they had little to fear from any cause other than the storms which disturbed the sea; now they were exposed to cruel persecution from their fellow-men. The perils which surrounded them were of a strange and novel kind. New, untried dangers are those which we always dread the most. The person who goes to sea for the first time is terrified by storms through which the old sailor calmly sleeps. A timid child trembles at his first examination, even though he may know that no punishment awaits his failure. This additional terror of novelty, then, increased the dread with which the apostles must have regarded the persecutions to which they were exposed. How was it that they faced them so boldly? The answer is: they knew that at every moment of life they were in the hands of God; they prayed for and received the strength of the Holy Spirit; and though their beloved Master had been removed from earth, they felt that He was always near them.

The prayer at the close of the chapter, and the boldness which was given to the disciples, are illustrated well by a poem of a great English poet, which describes the various ways by which a tyrant tried to bend one poor man to his will. The poem ends with these words, spoken by the tyrant,

‘The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God’s skirts, and prayed!
—So, I was afraid.’

LESSON 195.

Read Acts v.

THE dreadful fate of Ananias and Sapphira conveys a lesson of great importance. It tells us of the wickedness and of the punishment of one kind of lying. Lies in general are condemned in many parts of the Bible; as, for example, in the Proverbs, ‘Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord’ (Proverbs xii. 22), and in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, where he says, ‘Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another.’ Lying is hateful to God, because He is

Truth, and injurious to men, because without trust in each other men cannot live together in society. All kinds of lies come under these condemnations, but we must observe here that the lie of Ananias and Sapphira was not an ordinary lie. There was something unusually wicked in its nature, to which St. Peter draws special attention, for he says, 'Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God,' and in another place he calls it a 'lie to the Holy Ghost.' What, then, was the peculiarity in their deceit? In the first place, they were hypocrites. They might have kept all their riches, and no one would have noticed them, but they wanted to gain credit for a sacrifice which they had not really made; they desired to pass for more righteous than they really were; they deliberately went out of their way to make their fellow-men admire and praise what was not admirable or praiseworthy. To tell a lie, in order to conceal a hasty fault, is very wrong; but there is a much greater depth of wickedness in telling a lie in order that we may gain credit for a virtue which we do not possess. Then, again, it is probable that Ananias and his wife hoped to gain God's favour and approval by doing only a part of what they knew to be their duty. The teaching, and still more the example, of the other believers had shown them that, in the struggling condition of the early Church, it was right to have all their property in common. They saw this clearly, and yet deceived themselves into believing that God would be satisfied with them if they gave up only half their money. Their giving anything was accompanied by a claim to support out of the common stock; they were trying to trade, for their own profit, upon the warmth and zeal of fresh and enthusiastic love. Their attempt was not only to deceive their fellow-men, but to darken their own consciences, and to shut out the light which God had poured upon them. Their quenching of that light was really lying to the Holy Ghost, for it was the light of the Holy Ghost that had shone into their consciences. The dreadful doom of these two persons is a warning to all of us; it shows God's displeasure against those who trifle with their consciences, who 'lie and *do not* the truth.'

The scene in the council-chamber which followed the apprehension of the apostles shows us how the accused, strong in their innocence, could turn upon and judge their judges. The contrast between the high priest's petulant charge, 'Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us,' and St. Peter's reply, 'We ought to obey God rather than men,' is most marked.

The council were ready to slay men whose will they could not bend, but were turned from their design by a remarkable speech delivered by Gamaliel, one of their body. The sum of his advice is given in his concluding words, 'Refrain from these men, and let

them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.' Gamaliel was a very learned and able Pharisee, and also a really reverent and modest man. He believed equally in the supreme wisdom of God and in man's liability to error. He was by no means convinced of the truth of the new faith which the apostles taught, but he was not one of those persons who are ready to condemn any new opinion which they cannot immediately accept. There was, no doubt, something which struck him in the evident sincerity of the apostles; and although some of their doctrines were against the bias of his education and feelings, he advised his fellow-councillors to abstain from rash and inconsiderate persecution. He warned them that in resorting to it they might ignorantly be persecuting the truth, or, as he expressed it, be 'fighting against God.' Had Gamaliel's modest and reverent disposition been more common in the world, what sufferings would mankind in all ages have been spared, and how much more rapid might have been the spread of truth!

LESSON 196.

Read Acts vi.

THIS chapter is very short, but there are several points which need some explanation. It is, in fact, a turning-point in the history. Hitherto, only the *rulers* of the Jews have been found persecuting the followers of Jesus: they had been in favour with the *people*. Here we find the *people* acting with the elders and the scribes in the persecution of Stephen. If we wish to understand this change of feeling we must find out who Stephen was, and what brought him forward as the champion of the new religion. To answer these questions we must begin by asking, Who were the Grecians that murmured against the Hebrews?

For several centuries—indeed, from the end of the Babylonian Captivity—the Jews had been scattered through nearly all the lands of the civilised world. Some of them, as we have seen in one of our Old Testament lessons, returned to Palestine, and there maintained all their old customs, and spoke a language allied to the Hebrew, which they had used before their captivity. These Jews retained the old name of Hebrews, or Hebraic Jews.

Other Jews, scattered throughout Eastern Asia, Western Europe, and Northern Africa, maintained a general respect for the laws of Moses, but were unable, from the circumstances of their dwelling, to comply with all its ceremonial observances. They, moreover, discontinued the use of the Aramaic language, and

adopted that of the nations among whom they dwelt. This was generally Greek, and hence these Jews were called Grecians, or Hellenist Jews.¹ It was to meet the wants of a colony of these Grecian Jews at Alexandria that the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was made in the second century before Christ. The constant intercourse with Gentiles, which was the result of this first dispersion, had two results: many Gentiles were instructed, to a certain extent, in the worship of the One True God; and, on the other hand, a great deal of the narrowness and exclusiveness which characterised the Jews of Palestine was broken down in their Grecian brethren. This broadening of their views was, however, very distasteful to the more rigid, or Hebraic Jews. When Grecians took up their abode, as they sometimes did, in Jerusalem, they still were kept separate from the Hebrews; they worshipped in the same Temple, but they had separate synagogues.

The natural jealousy between these two classes of Jews was not at once destroyed by their conversion to Christianity. The Hebrews were far more numerous, and had at first all the management of the property. Murmurings arose because the widows of the Grecian Jews did not receive the share to which they were entitled of the provisions purchased out of the common property of all the believers. The murmurings came to the ears of the apostles, who suggested the remedy of which we have just read. It is a significant fact, as showing how desirous all the early Christians were to have everything relating to property fairly and justly done, that all the seven men who were chosen by the body of the believers to distribute the daily provisions bear Greek names. This is an indication that they were Grecian Jews.

Stephen, one of the seven deacons (the name 'deacon' means 'attendant'), was the first, so far as we know, of the followers of our Saviour, who apprehended for himself and then taught to others, the truth that the Gospel was complete in itself, and did not need to be supported by the ceremonial of the Mosaic law. He, a Jew, though a Grecian Jew, taught this truth to Jews, and to Jews only; for we must be careful to remember that hitherto no attempt had been made to teach the Gospel to Gentiles; but the mere hint of the possibility of any abolition of the Mosaic law, even of its ceremonial part, was enough to excite the fury of the Jewish mob. The charge on which Stephen was brought before the council was that he had said that 'this Jesus of Nazareth should destroy this place' (the Temple), 'and change the customs which Moses delivered us.'

¹ An important distinction must here be pointed out. The word 'Grecians' in the New Testament always means 'Jews who spoke

Greek;' the word 'Greeks' is of very wide meaning, and is almost equivalent to 'Gentiles.'

LESSON 197.

Read Acts vii.

[N.B.—The comment on the speech of St. Stephen is very short, for this reason: I am convinced that a teacher can best use this chapter by treating it as a résumé of early Hebrew history, and by spending nearly all the time allotted to the lesson in catechising his scholars on that history.]

THE courage of Stephen must be very particularly noticed: his calm self-possession made a great impression even upon his bitter enemies. It is shown even in his choice of words: he proved to the Jews that they were then actuated by the same spirit which led their ancestors to kill the prophets of the Lord. The speech itself is a signal fulfilment of the promise of our Saviour to His disciples: 'Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:'—when they were brought before rulers for His name's sake—'for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' Stephen had no time to meditate: he was seized and hurried off by a violent mob to the council, and was obliged to speak at once in his own defence. His speech is interesting, not merely as a summary of Hebrew history, but as an argument against the assumptions made by those who accused him. They asserted that he blasphemed God because he spoke of changes in religion. He showed that all God's government of the Chosen People had been a succession of developments; that it was a continuous plan, which was not executed all at once, and implied some such completion as that which he said Jesus had given. In the second place, they assumed that the Temple at Jerusalem was the only witness of God's presence. Stephen showed clearly that the Temple, instead of being the most ancient, was the most recent of their institutions. The great stress which he lays upon God's *call*, first to Abraham, afterwards to Moses, must be compared with St. Peter's statement which we have lately read, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'

The words in the 58th verse, 'The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul,' must be noticed. This was he who afterwards, under the name of Paul, became the great preacher of the faith he was then trying to destroy. It is generally said that his presence at the execution of the sentence upon Stephen is a proof that at the time he was a member of the council.

Lastly, we must notice St. Stephen's last words: the example

of our Saviour had had its full effect upon him; it enabled him to face danger manfully, and to die, as his Saviour had died, with words of forgiveness, a prayer for his murderers, upon his lips.

LESSON 198.

www.libtobooks.org **Read Acts viii.**

THIS chapter contains an account of the preaching of Philip, another of the seven deacons, and, in the conversion of the Samaritans and of the Ethiopian, shows us a continuation of the process of extension of the Christian faith which was begun by the preaching of Stephen. An old saying runs, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.' In St. Stephen's case most undoubtedly it was so. The Jewish mob, having once proceeded to the extremity of putting a Christian to death, indulged their fury without restraint. Like a tiger which has once tasted blood, nothing but blood could satisfy them. But for this persecution, the Christians would scarcely have left Jerusalem so soon; but being driven from it they preached the Gospel abroad; 'they went everywhere preaching the word.' The Samaritans, as having a small mixture of Hebrew blood, and the Ethiopian, as a proselyte, occupied a position intermediate between Jews and Gentiles. Their conversion, therefore, was an advance, and an indication that actual contact between Christianity and heathenism must soon take place.

The special point to which it is desirable to direct attention in this lesson is the sin of Simon Magus, and the rebuke which it called forth from St. Peter. The thought so severely condemned has, in one form or another, been common in all ages. Simon thought that the gifts of God could be purchased with money, instead of seeing that the acquisition of them depends entirely upon the regeneration of our spirits, or, as it is beautifully expressed in Scripture, upon our living 'a new life.' This error appears, as has been said, in many shapes. In the history of the past, we read of men obtaining other persons' possessions by robbery, violence, and murder, and of their then trying to secure the favour of Heaven by simply giving for some charitable or religious purpose a small portion of their ill-gotten gains, without at the same time changing the general course of their lives or desires. In the present day we find the same kind of delusion. We see men making money by occupations dangerous and hurtful to their fellow-men; we see some, for instance, sending ships to sea in an unseaworthy state, that they may swell their profits; we see others using false weights and measures, making their own gain by cheating their customers; we see others, in the pursuit of

pleasure, leading their fellow-men to do wrong, or placing them in circumstances of great temptation. We often find such men attempting to atone in the sight of Heaven for these profitable sins, by giving money for useful or benevolent purposes, though seldom in such quantities as to peril or restrain their own enjoyments. What is such conduct but trying to purchase with money that gift of pardon which God bestows only in exchange for sincere repentance and amendment of life? For such men suppose that by giving out of their abundance they can cover the wickedness of their lives. We learnt from the story of the Widow's Mite that it is not in proportion to the earthly value of men's gifts that they are acceptable to God, but only in proportion to the self-denial at the expense of which they are given. This story of Simon teaches us the same lesson, with this addition, that it shows us the hardening and blinding effect of allowing this calculating spirit to intrude upon our devotions: if we do such things, we are in Simon's case—our hearts are not right in the sight of God. Another lesson we should learn from the same story, is one which can best be expressed in the words of St. James in the second chapter of his Epistle. Simon's belief, whatever it was, was not such as to influence his life and change his character. St. James, in the chapter referred to, proves most clearly that faith and works, belief and action must go hand in hand together. He shows us that while faith is dead, unless it lead to works, faith must suggest and accompany works if they are to be acceptable to God. He instances the case of Abraham, and says, 'Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?'

The ready reception of the Gospel by the Samaritans is connected by some commentators with the events related in the 4th chapter of St. John's Gospel. Our Saviour Himself, after He had spoken to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well, and had told her 'all things that ever she did,' remained some days in the town of Sychar. There, we are told, many people believed Him to be the Messiah. Those events could not have taken place more than five or six years before Philip's preaching; many Samaritans would, doubtless, remember the Master's words, and would be prepared to hear from His follower the story of His death and resurrection.

The Cæsarea of which we read in the last verse was not the Cæsarea Philippi of which we read in the Gospel, but a city on the sea-coast, which was the ordinary residence of the Roman Procurator.

LESSON 199.

Read Acts ix.

THE conversion of St. Paul,¹ recorded in this chapter, is one of the most important events in the history of Christianity. It was by his unwearied zeal and diligence that the Christian faith was widely made known throughout the Roman Empire; and the Epistles which he wrote to the various Churches which he founded, have always been considered as the fullest exposition of Christian doctrines. How admirably he was fitted for the work he had to do will be seen as we proceed; our present subject is his conversion, or change from being a persecutor of the Christians to being a teacher of the faith he had once tried to destroy.

From this chapter we learn, first, the energy and enthusiasm of St. Paul's character. To begin with, indeed, this energy was wrongly directed; but, from his own words, spoken many years afterwards—'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth'—we know that it was conscientiously directed. In persecuting Christians, which he did with all his might, Saul was persecuting a religion which from his heart he believed to be false. But he differed from many other persecutors in being willing to receive fuller light. He was not so obstinately determined to believe that he was, and always had been, right, as to close his ears to God's voice. Now, it is comparatively easy for us to change an opinion to which we have never given practical effect, but it is very painful to abandon one which has actively influenced our lives and conduct. Still more distressing is it to do so, if we are thereby compelled to admit that, in trying to do what in our ignorance we have thought useful and laudable, we have all along been doing cruel harm to our fellow-men. But this was just what St. Paul had to do, and he did it cheerfully, readily, and without reserve. He had exerted himself to the utmost to destroy Christianity; he was now called upon to believe that he had all the time been fighting against God. It is true that he had an unusual vision to enlighten him, but we must not suppose that miracles will convert a man obstinately blind to the truth. On the contrary, we have our Lord's own teaching in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' St. Paul would have remained deaf to the meaning of the words which were spoken to him on the road to Damascus

¹ I use the better-known name 'Paul' from the first, except where I allude specially to his unconverted state. The teacher will explain that

the name Paul is not used in the New Testament until the first missionary journey has commenced.

if he had not been a man ready to sacrifice the most deeply-rooted and dearly-cherished convictions to the will of God.

We must notice also that St. Paul was called upon not only to abandon the convictions he had cherished and acted upon, but further, to engage in a course of life which should be, as he himself afterwards expressed it, 'preaching the faith which once he destroyed.' He went on to Damascus, as he had purposed when he left Jerusalem, but, instead of using his energy and talents against the Christians, he devoted them to the work of preaching Christ.

NOTE.—What has been said in an earlier lesson (149) on the limited powers of the Sanhedrin seems to be in conflict with the facts stated in this and the three preceding chapters, but it has been suggested, as an explanation of the events recorded in this part of the Acts, that they were contemporaneous with the maddest part of the reign of Caligula. Under that emperor the whole machinery of the Roman Empire was disorganised, especially in the eastern provinces. Procurators and governors were recalled on the most frivolous pretexts, and, consequently, those who were not interfered with let matters take their own course. This was just such an opportunity as the Jewish Sanhedrin would be glad to seize upon to strain and exceed their powers, and this mission of Saul to Damascus, with the previous bitter persecution of Christians, shows that they did avail themselves of it. [The question is more fully argued in a book called 'Paul of Tarsus'; Macmillan, 1872.]

LESSON 200.

Read Acts x.

WE read in this chapter how St. Peter was warned by God that he had in one matter misunderstood Christ's teaching, and was shown that he was not to withhold the Gospel from the Gentiles.

If we desire to learn true modesty, and to strengthen our faith, we should through life meditate long and often on this simple story of Peter's vision. It teaches us modesty by showing us how, notwithstanding all his advantages, Peter had fallen into one great mistake as to Christ's mission. It also teaches us faith, because we learn from it that if our hearts are open to God's voice, He will in His own good time give us the understanding necessary to enable us to do the particular work He wishes us to do for Him.

Let us, then, examine this story first as a lesson of modesty. Consider St. Peter's advantages. He had lived for some years in daily, familiar intercourse with Christ, had heard His doctrines from His own lips, had enjoyed opportunities of questioning

Christ as to the true meaning of His mission, and, lastly, after his Master's departure, had received the Holy Ghost. Yet he had remained ignorant of one of the essential truths of Christianity, namely, 'that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him.' Peter's early Jewish education had, in fact, blinded him to the world-wide character of Christ's kingdom. If, then, Peter could fall into such an error and remain in it so long, how presumptuous must it be for any other man to assume that he has perfectly understood God's truths, and to despise and abuse those who may differ from him! It must further be observed that it was Peter's modesty, his readiness to be taught, which alone enabled him to benefit by the vision when he had seen it. We know that multitudes of Jews remained unmoved and unconverted by Christ's most striking miracles, and that after seeing the miracles they hardened their hearts against His teaching. This warning from God to Peter came in such a form that it would have been easy for him to question and doubt its miraculous character. Had Peter been a vain, presumptuous man, had he entertained great dislike for all who differed from him, and cared little for the truth, *had he assumed that the certainty of his own opinions was in proportion to the love he had for them*, the vision would not have awakened him to a sense of his error. He would have failed to catch its meaning, or to hear in it the voice of God, and would have refused to believe that Christ had died to save all men, even the Roman oppressors of his nation.

Next, let us take the chapter as a lesson of faith. We must mark that, great as was the error into which Peter (and the other disciples) had fallen, it does not appear to have led to any bad results. Up to this time, as we have seen, the apostles had come into contact with Jews only, and it was, therefore, not yet important for them to know that their preaching was not always to be confined to Jews. But now, when God wished Peter to carry the Gospel tidings to the Gentile Cornelius, He delivered Peter from his error and enlightened him as to his duty. In this we see a proof of what the Bible in other parts often tells us, namely, that God is not far from every one of us; that He is watching over us, and will, in His own good time, correct our errors, if only our hearts be open to receive the revelation of His will. He may not speak to us, as He did to Peter, in visions, but He speaks to us still in many other ways. He speaks, for instance, in the voice of Scripture, in which we shall always find, if we seek for them, fresh messages especially fitted to the particular circumstances and state in which we may at the moment be placed. He speaks to us in the clear though still voice of our own consciences; He speaks

to us through the voice of the Christian Church; and, lastly, in the examples of the great and good men of all ages.

But He speaks only to humble hearts like St. Peter's. Let us, then, pray that no vain love of our own opinions may blind our spiritual sight, or harden our hearts against His messages.

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LESSON 201.

Read Acts xi.

IN this chapter we read of the effect produced upon the minds of the other apostles by St. Peter's conduct in the case of Cornelius. Their contention with St. Peter shows how common was the error which the vision had dispelled from St. Peter's mind. The vision was given to him only, but his rehearsal of it and of the events which followed it, carried conviction to their minds also. It is very instructive to notice how readily they all acknowledged the importance and the meaning of the facts. The voice came to Peter while he was in solitude, but the facts, which a great philosopher has called a revelation of God's will, were patent to them all. They did not attempt any other explanation in order to justify their first opposition, but most frankly acknowledged their error, and received St. Peter's explanation, in the words 'then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.' It is instructive also to notice, as bearing on what was said in the last lesson, about St. Peter's error in spite of his advantages, that in explaining his conduct he does not refer merely to the vision of a few days previous, but also to words which he had heard his Master speak; 'then remembered I the word of the Lord.' It is as if he had said, 'This is no new truth, but one which was contained in Christ's own teaching.' The readiness of the apostles and of the Church at large to accept their altered circumstances showed that they too possessed that spirit of modesty so essential in the search for truth and the performance of duty: they were receiving the blessing promised by our Saviour, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Almost at the same time with St. Peter's mission to Cornelius, the declaration of the Gospel was made to Gentiles by other preachers at Antioch. Some of those who were scattered abroad preached only to Jews, others addressed Gentiles¹ also, and with the most encouraging results. 'A great number believed and turned to the Lord.'

¹ There can be no doubt but that 'Grecians,' in v. 20, is a misreading for 'Greeks.' 'Grecians' could not be opposed to 'Jews,' because, as already shown (p. 368), the 'Gre-

cians' of the New Testament were *Jews*, differing from the 'Hebrews' only in their use of the Greek language.

At Antioch, the followers of Jesus were first distinguished by the name, now universal, of 'Christians.' That name was originally a term of reproach, and is never used in the New Testament by the apostles, or other followers of Christ, of themselves. Where it is used, it is put into the mouths of enemies, and in such a way as to make it clear that it was used reproachfully. The disciples are called by themselves, 'believers,' or 'brethren,' or 'they of the way:' the last expression is very common in the Acts. The close of the chapter shows how essential a part of Christianity the brotherly love which shows itself in brotherly help was felt to be. The Jewish Christians in Judæa were in want: the Gentile Christians of Antioch felt themselves to be members of the same body, and determined to send relief to their poorer brethren; 'which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.'

In the preceding lesson, on the vision of St. Peter, it seemed unadvisable to introduce the question of the fitness of the vision to teach the truths which St. Peter undeniably learnt from it. A short statement of the facts bearing on this question will be in place at the end of the comment on this chapter, which records the opposition of the body of the believers at Jerusalem to St. Peter's action.

The most clearly marked and generally observable distinction between Jews and Gentiles arose out of the scrupulous adherence of the Jews to the Mosaic law of clean and unclean meats; any person could recognise a Jew, wherever he went, by his abstinence from the flesh of an unclean beast, or of even a clean beast if it were not prepared in his own particular way. Now we all know that the more noticeable any distinction is, the more it is valued, and the more urgently its observance is insisted upon by those who are interested in it. This was the case with the Jews, in respect to the distinction between clean and unclean meats. The scrupulous observance of outward forms by the Pharisees had its effect on the whole nation, and even on the disciples of Christ. To allow that there was nothing common or unclean was to give up the great distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that St. Peter, whose mind was open to God's teaching, understood at once that the abolition of this distinction was a symbol of the abolition of all distinctions between Jew and Gentile; that he learnt from it the great truth which it was St. Paul's privilege and delight to express afterwards so emphatically, that in the new life 'there is neither Greek [Gentile] nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all.'

LESSON 202.

Read Acts xii.

THE release of St. Peter from prison, which is the main subject of this chapter, presents few difficulties requiring comment.

It is a proof that the disciples were not mistaken in the faith which, as we have frequently observed, they held very firmly, namely, that they were under God's care and protection, and that He could and would deliver them from their enemies. The solid ground for this assurance is not shaken by the fact that St. James was put to death by Herod. For, blended with the faith they had in God's present care over them, they had an assurance, equally strong, of an immortal life of blessedness. Therefore their hopes were not bounded by the present life: whether they lived or died, they were the Lord's. If He had a work for them to do on this earth, He would deliver them out of the hand of any human foe, and give them strength to accomplish the work; if He allowed them to fall by the sword of the executioner, He was but calling them through death to an endless reward. In either case they were in His hands, and therefore safe. Such deaths as that of St. James, instead of making us gloomy, should be looked at as an old Jewish writer (whose writings are preserved in what is called the Apocrypha) looked at the deaths of some who in his day, two or three hundred years before our Saviour's birth, were slain for the truth. 'The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.'

The mention of Herod the King, and the statement that he committed these acts of persecution at his own will, require some explanation. Between the persecution of Stephen and this persecution a considerable time had elapsed, and the government of Judæa had undergone some changes. To understand them we must go back to the days of the Herod who was reigning at the time when our Saviour was born. It was noticed in one of our introductory lessons that the Romans made Herod king, and reserved to themselves the right to confirm or refuse the inheritance of the kingdom to his sons. At the death of Herod the Great, small portions of his dominions were given to his sons, and the greater part put under the rule of a procurator. This continued for many years, but at last Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, received from the Emperor Caius Caligula a grant of

the provinces of Judæa, Samaria, and Galilee, with the title of King. During his time, therefore, there was no procurator, and he, as king, had power of life and death over his subjects. He presents, as we read his history, the not unusual combination of outward religious zeal and personal profligacy. He was a strict observer of the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, and it was probably as a proof of his zeal for that law that he killed St. James, and imprisoned St. Peter. But his personal character was extremely bad: even at Rome, where he resided for some time previous to his appointment as King of Judæa, and which was then the most wicked city in the world, he was distinguished for his profligacy. His miserable end, the end of a man who cared only for himself, is doubly impressive from its contrast with what we have heard of the death of St. James.

Two words require special notes.

'Quaternions of Soldiers.' Herod adopted many Roman customs, and, among others, that of committing his prisoners to the care of soldiers. A quaternion, or band of four, was on duty at one time; two within the cell, to whom the prisoner was fastened by chains, and two outside the door of the cell. The four quaternions were required to relieve each other, for the prisoners were watched night and day; each quaternion would thus have six hours on duty and eighteen off. Herod adopted with this custom the Roman rule, that negligent guards should be punished with death.

'Easter.' The word should be translated 'the Passover.' Herod had no notion of keeping a Christian feast, and, indeed, it is probable that, at that early time, the weekly festival, Sunday, was the only memorial kept by Christians of the Resurrection of our Saviour.

LESSON 203.

Read Acts xiii.

THIS chapter is historically very important, for it relates how St. Paul set out on his first missionary journey. There are no indications of the exact date of this journey, but in all probability it was about eighteen years after the Crucifixion of our Saviour. What, however, makes this event important is that it was the first attempt to spread a knowledge of the Gospel in lands far away from Judæa. The policy of the believers in Christ had hitherto been to preach the Gospel to those who came within the reach of their voices. This was the beginning of a new policy, that of going abroad to find men who might be induced to listen. And in another respect St. Paul's ministry from the first differed from that of the other apostles. They only ministered to Gentiles, as it were, by constraint; he made the preaching of the Gospel to *all*

men, Jews or Gentiles, the end to be aimed at in all his labours. It is true that in any place to which he came he preached first to Jews, if any Jews were there—he made the synagogue of the Jews his first place of teaching. This was because he was himself a Jew; because he knew that the Gospel had interpreted to him many parts of the old Scriptures, which they believed as well as himself, and because he had not lost his patriotism by his conversion to Christianity. The small number of Jews who would listen to his words would form in any place a nucleus or centre round which a Church might grow. But, much as St. Paul loved his fellow-countrymen, he loved the truth more. When the Jews refused to accept the Gospel he wished to teach them, he turned, as at Antioch, to the Gentiles. The two preachers, Barnabas and Paul, set out from Antioch and went first to Cyprus, of which island Barnabas was a native. In Cyprus their preaching of the Gospel met with great success. Among their converts was Sergius Paulus, the deputy—or, as his official name properly is, the proconsul—of the island.

It is to be noticed that it is at this point that the Apostle receives, in the New Testament, the name of Paul, which we have been using for him all along. Many commentators believe that he took this new name as an acknowledgment of his affection for his convert Sergius Paulus. Hebrew names, such as Saul, were very generally mispronounced by both Greeks and Romans, and it became a custom for Jews travelling in Gentile lands to assume besides their own a Gentile name of somewhat similar sound. The name Paul may have been thus adopted by Saul. Other writers, however, say that it was common for Jews to have the two names, a Hebrew and a Gentile name, from the first. They suppose that Saul had been called Paul from his boyhood, and that the Gentile name now comes into use because his work among Gentiles was beginning.

Antioch, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter as St. Paul's starting-point for this journey, was a place of considerable importance. From it great roads led eastward, and on these roads caravans were constantly passing to and fro, bringing the riches of the further East to Antioch, that thence they might be exported to the West. Antioch was what we should call a great commercial centre. Now this point deserves some attention, for the first preachers of Christianity, whenever they were able, chose just such places for the establishment of Churches, such as we shall see hereafter were founded at Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and Rome itself. But why did they choose commercial towns for their evangelical centres? One reason, undoubtedly, was that in such places they were

sure to meet with Jews, whose devotion to commerce was as strong in those ages as it is now ; and, meeting with Jews, would have some common ground to begin upon, some nucleus round which to gather their other converts. But another reason was, that as the commercial towns were places of general resort, their efforts would there be most effectually used. A few weeks of Christian preaching in a city like Antioch, or the others named above, would bring the sound of the Gospel to the ears and its truth to the hearts of more persons than as many years of preaching in a quiet, less frequented place. Besides, the teachers were constantly going from one place to another, and could not readily find means of conveyance except between places of some commercial importance.

LESSON 204.

Read Acts xiv.

THE 'persecution against Paul and Barnabas,' of which we read in the last chapter, seems not to have gone to the extreme of an attack upon their persons. In the next place to which they came, such an attack was prevented only by their prudence in leaving the town. Their Master had encouraged His disciples to bear persecution, when, persecution befell them, by the promise that He would give them a reward, but at the same time He had warned them against any foolhardy running into danger. 'If they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another.' He probably meant them to understand that they were not to allow a mistaken notion of fidelity to His cause to hinder their work for Him. If men in one place refused to hear them, and proceeded to attack them, they should remember that there were other places, and men in those places who might be willing to accept what the first had refused. In this lies all the difference between prudence and cowardice. If Paul and Barnabas had given up the work altogether they would have acted with cowardice ; as it was, they preserved their lives by flight from Iconium only to risk them again in the carrying on of the same work in Lystra and Derbe. We may surely take a lesson from them : it is cowardice to abandon a design which we know or believe to be right, because the execution of it causes us personal inconvenience ; to give up one way of doing it, and to choose another which with less opposition will lead to the desired result, is a wise use of our energy, which we may fairly call prudence.

The conduct of the heathen mob at Lystra is very much like that of uneducated mobs everywhere. The feeling or impulse of the moment is their only guide, and the feelings of a mob are proverbially fickle and changeable. What at one moment they worship they are the next moment ready to destroy. What they hate at

one time they are not unlikely at another time to praise and esteem.

The short address of St. Paul to the men of Lystra is extremely interesting, for it is the first instance we meet with of the way in which he preached to heathens. It would manifestly have been of no use to tell them of the commandments given by God to the ancient Israelites—that way of beginning to preach Christianity was applicable only to Jewish hearers. The Apostle had, therefore, to argue on the principles of what is called Natural Religion, that is, on those truths which the objects around us and our own human nature can teach us about God. The men of Lystra, moreover, were very rude and uncultivated persons, and so could be expected to take in only the simplest of natural lessons. The fertility of the soil around their city must have been given by some power. St. Paul told them that the power was that of the Living God who made heaven and earth. From this very simple fact he argues that the worship of images of wood and stone, which were without life, and could give no life to vegetation, much less fill men's hearts with food and gladness, was useless and unprofitable, and that the images themselves were 'vanities' or empty things. It is instructive to compare this simple speech with words which St. Paul wrote some years afterwards to the Christians at Rome, in which he treats of the same subject. He says (Romans i. 19, 20): 'That which may be known of God is manifest in them: for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.'

The return of the apostles Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and their reporting there on the success of their foreign ministry, marks a fact of importance in the history of the Christian Church. Jerusalem was, and continued to be for another twenty years, the centre of Jewish Christianity, but Antioch was the centre of the Christian Church in the widest sense, as embracing Gentiles as well as Jews.

LESSON 205.

Read Acts xv.

WE read in this chapter of some of the differences of opinion which, to a certain extent, divided the early Christian Church.

The first is a difference of opinion between the two great sections of the Church—the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians—as to the necessity and the limits of obedience to the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. We found, in a previous lesson, that there were some Jewish Christians who were disposed to blame St. Peter for his conduct in the case of Cornelius, but that

when he had explained all the circumstances they withdrew their opposition. But one such yielding did not appear to them to involve the yielding of a principle; it was, they seem to have thought, an individual case, to be judged wholly on its own merits. A few years passed, and the case was greatly altered. By the exertions of the teachers sent out from Antioch the Gospel had been made widely known among the Gentiles, and it seemed likely that before long all traces of the connection between Christianity and Judaism would be lost. The prejudices of their education were still so strong in the minds of many of the Jewish Christians that they could not readily accept the new state of things. A remark may be repeated here which was made in the lesson on the foundation of the kingdom of Israel, namely, that it is extremely difficult for persons living in a time of change to believe that the old things which are passing away, and the new things which are just beginning, are both ordained by God, and that old and new are good in their own place. The Jewish Christians were, no doubt, right in continuing to keep the commands of the Law under which they had been brought up: their adherence to the customs of their forefathers was strictly conscientious; but their attempt to bind the consciences of the Gentiles was unwise and un-Christian. The Gentile Christians, on the other hand, would have surrendered the greatest of the truths they had learnt—namely, that the blessings of the Gospel were intended for all men—if they had, by submission to the ceremonies of the Jewish law, confessed that their conversion was till then imperfect. It would have been a violation of their own consciences to have yielded to any pressure such as some of the Jewish Christians tried to put upon them.

In the discussion and decision of the question two points are to be noticed:—

1. St. Peter declares that even those Christians who held most strongly to the authority of the Mosaic law confessed obedience to it to be imperfect without 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The Gentile Christians, he said, had this grace; why should it be thought necessary that they should have the earlier and imperfect as well? St. Paul's words in the Epistle to the Corinthians sum up, in very brief space, the whole argument: 'When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.'

2. St. James, the president of the council, and also, as is generally believed, of the Church in Jerusalem, puts the extension of the Gospel to Gentiles as a fulfilment of God's eternal purpose—'known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.'

¹ The readings of this passage in the Greek are very various. I have quoted the Authorised Version, and

have given what, any reading being adopted, seems to me the only interpretation.

The second difference of opinion which the chapter records is a personal difference between Paul and Barnabas with respect to John, whose surname was Mark. There are many indications in the New Testament that St. Paul was a man of quick, eager feelings, and that he was disposed to express them very warmly. Barnabas, probably, was an indulgent, kindly man, and would not give up his young relative—John, better known by his surname Mark—for one failure in duty. The lesson we may learn from the dispute lies in very small compass. The apostles were not exempt from human failings and infirmities; they found that they could not work well together, and therefore they separated; but neither of them allowed his own feelings to interfere with the work which God had called them both to do. It is pleasing to know that in later years St. Paul was not only reconciled to Mark, but spoke of him as a comfort and a help.

LESSON 206.

Read Acts xvi.

THE chief interest of this chapter lies in the fact that it contains the account of the introduction of Christianity into Europe. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this event; to follow it out into all its consequences would involve a careful examination of the advantages which have resulted to Europe, and to all the world, from the blending of Christianity with civilisation. We can scarcely read the chapter without thinking that the events which attended the first preaching of the Gospel in the city of Philippi were a kind of prophecy, or type, of its effects throughout the civilised world. The typical bearing of these events has often been dwelt upon. We may notice here the contrast presented by the first converts, and hint briefly at the effects which the truths of Christianity have produced on the three classes of persons to which they belonged.

The first convert was a woman. We often speak of women of the ancient world as very much oppressed: our ideas on this point are probably exaggerated. Lydia must have had considerable freedom, or she could not have engaged as she did in trade on her own account. In Macedonia woman's position was higher than in other parts of the civilised world; but even there her freedom was only on sufferance. In Italy, and in most parts of Greece, woman was either regarded as greatly inferior to man, or liberty was granted to her which amounted to licence. Christianity taught that in God's sight woman is the equal of man, and has equal rights with man in all matters of spiritual concern.

The next convert was a slave. Now we must remember that

the best men of the ancient heathen world did not possess that hatred of slavery which we have inherited from our fathers. Even the apostle St. Paul never directly attacked the institution of slavery. But his teaching, that the slave who accepted the truths he announced became God's free-man, was destined to be the power which should at last secure the liberty of mankind.

The third and last-mentioned of the converts was a Roman official. He had been trained to acknowledge order and to submit himself to discipline. The system of Roman Imperialism was a system whose organisation was almost perfect. A Roman official would be attracted to St. Paul's preaching of Christianity, as a kingdom of which God Himself was the head, a kingdom of order not maintained by tyranny, a kingdom where right took the place occupied in the Roman Empire by might and sheer brute force.

The action of the magistrates when they commanded Paul and Silas to be beaten and imprisoned was entirely illegal. They were carried away by the tumult of the multitude, and did not think that the poor Jew before them could cause them any trouble. But when the morning came, and they found that they had ordered a Roman citizen, against whom nothing had been proved, to be beaten, it was their turn to be humble. The multitude had called themselves Romans, a title to which they had little or no claim; St. Paul was by birth a Roman citizen, and one of the best-established Roman laws was that to beat a Roman citizen was a scandalous crime. We shall find that on a subsequent occasion St. Paul claimed his rights as a citizen before the beating began.

It is to be noticed here that against Christians, as such, no laws were passed by the Roman Senate for many years. Such persecutions as this of which we have been reading were directly contrary to the law. In later times it was made a crime to be a Christian, but the persecutions which the apostles themselves endured, at all events till near the close of their lives, were not directed by any authority; they were merely suggested by the fury of mobs or the caprice of bad governors.

This chapter exhibits a great peculiarity in the use of the pronouns 'they' and 'we.' 'They' excludes the writer of the history; 'we' includes him. We learn, therefore, from the changes in the pronouns, that at Troas St. Paul was joined by St. Luke, who went with him to Philippi, stayed with him in the house of Lydia, and was present when he cast out the spirit from the slave-girl; but was *not* taken into custody or imprisoned with him and Silas, and did *not* accompany them when they left the city. It is a curious confirmation

of St. Luke's accuracy that from this point in the narrative he uses pronouns of the third person—'he' of St. Paul, 'they' of St. Paul and his companions—until he has to describe St. Paul's return to Philippi, about five years afterwards. Then—see Acts xx. 6—he takes up again the word 'we.' It was at Philippi that St. Luke remained behind, at Philippi that he rejoined St. Paul.

LESSON 207.

Read Acts xvii.

THE first thing that strikes us in reading this chapter is the evident importance of the Jewish element in the population of Thessalonica. The article prefixed to 'synagogue' at the end of the first verse is in the Greek the definite article—'*the* synagogue.' The use of the definite article in Greek expresses much more than it does in English. Here, for instance, what a Greek would understand St. Luke to mean is this: at Thessalonica there was the chief synagogue in that part of the world. Besides this fact, which a study of the original enables us to bring forward as a proof of the importance of the Jewish colony at Thessalonica, we have the proof of their influence over the rest of the people in the tumult which they raised. These indications agree with all that we can discover from ancient writers about the city. It had a very large Jewish population, and to this day there are in it more Jews than in any other city of its size in Europe. Amid all the changes of 1,800 years the Jewish colony at Thessalonica has retained its importance.

We must notice the turn given by the Jews to St. Paul's preaching of the 'kingdom of God.' They declared that he wished them to be disloyal to Cæsar, just as their brethren in Judæa, years before, had told Pilate that if he let Jesus go, he was not Cæsar's friend. This was the only charge on which they could hope to succeed against St. Paul before a just magistrate, and this charge they could not prove. The 'security taken of Jason and of the other' was what we should call 'bail.' Jason and the other brother were bound over to appear again before the magistrates if there should turn out to be any truth in the charge of treason brought against them.

The conduct of the Jews at Berea is a proof of what has been noticed several times with regard to St. Paul's manner of teaching his fellow-countrymen. He showed them that the Gospel he preached satisfied the conditions laid down in their own ancient Scriptures. The Berean Jews found that he was right: their diligent study of the Scriptures (of the *Old* Testament, we must be careful to remember) prepared them to receive the truths which St. Paul taught concerning Christ.

In St. Paul's speech at Athens we find another instance of what we read lately in the history of his first journey. As at Lystra so at Athens, he had to appeal to the principles of natural religion. But, while the inhabitants of Lystra were almost the rudest, those of Athens were the most polished and cultivated of heathens. Their philosophers had been, and still are considered, the most subtle thinkers the world has seen. It would not have done to have addressed them as he had addressed the men of Lystra. They wanted more of strict reasoning, less of appeal to common external objects of nature. St. Paul's argument with them is based on their recognition of a Godhead. The word which is translated 'Godhead' occurs only here in the New Testament; it was a technical term of Greek philosophy, and may perhaps be better rendered 'the Divine.' His argument is twofold. First he shows that it is impossible to confine within any place the great God who is Lord of heaven and earth. Next, assuming with a Greek poet that man is the offspring of God, he shows that man's attempt to make a God is an absurdity. These arguments were, doubtless, listened to with approval by many of the philosophers who were assembled there; for to some of them they must have seemed to be extensions of truths which they had themselves learned and taught. It was only when St. Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead that they began to mock him, and even then we are told that while *some* mocked, others desired to hear more of the new doctrines he taught. Now let us ask how St. Paul came to have such influence over an audience of the most cultivated and critical men then living. The answer involves two facts. First, he carried his hearers with him, by bringing forward first the truths in which they believed as well as he. Our English translation of the beginning of his speech is unfortunate, for, as we read it, he begins with a direct attack upon their superstition. It is now agreed by all scholars that the word 'very' should be put for 'too,' and 'scrupulously reverent,' or words with that meaning, for 'superstitious.' 'In all things ye are very scrupulously reverent' is really a compliment, not an attack.

Next: St. Paul had in his youth applied himself diligently to study. At Tarsus, his native city, there was a celebrated Greek university, in which he must have learnt Greek philosophy and literature. So he was able to use them when he needed them, as, for instance, in the line which he quoted from a Greek poet. His diligence in youth was really an important part of his preparation for the work of preaching the Gospel.

St. Paul's references to 'temples made with hands,' and to 'gold, silver, and stone graven by art and man's device,' gain immeasurably in effectiveness when we remember that the spot

where he stood while speaking was in front of a great Temple of Mars, and directly facing the Parthenon, or Temple of Athênê, which even now in its ruins is one of the grandest buildings in the world. On the hill of the Acropolis over against him was a colossal statue of Athênê, the guardian goddess of the city of Athens. (See, for a full description of Athens, and of its philosophies, Conybeare and Howson's 'St. Paul,' vol. i. chap. 10.)

LESSON 208.

Read Acts xviii.

WHY did St. Paul depart from Athens so soon after he had made a favourable impression upon the people? The question cannot be answered with certainty, but the truth seems to be that he felt that Corinth would be a better field for his labours. Athens was a city where philosophy was greatly cultivated, where arts and letters flourished, but it was not the scene of any busy traffic. Corinth, on the other hand, standing on an isthmus, and having a port on each of the two seas which that isthmus divided, had passing through it, eastward and westward, constant streams of travellers, bound either on business or on pleasure. This difference would be quite sufficient to induce St. Paul to choose Corinth, rather than Athens, as a centre for his work in Greece. The Church founded here by St. Paul quickly grew to importance; two of his longest Epistles which are preserved, and another, which has been lost, were addressed to it. Here first we read of a separate building being occupied by a Christian congregation. Of the events which marked his stay at Corinth, the attempt of the Jews to prosecute him before Gallio, the deputy, or pro-consul, of Achaia, must be noticed. The Roman laws at that time permitted to every man freedom in the exercise of his religion, provided none of its precepts or practices appeared to the government to endanger the public peace or morals. St. Paul was therefore as much under the protection of the law, even if he had not been a Roman citizen, as the Jews who wanted Gallio to condemn him. Gallio's behaviour is that of a magistrate who wishes to do substantial justice between man and man, but will not interfere with any man's opinions unless they show themselves in unlawful acts. His carelessness, as it has been called, is the impartiality, not unmixed with contempt, of a civil governor, who, following the instructions of the law he is sent to administer, refuses to be mixed up in the questions which must arise when a man is called to give account of his religious views.

St. Paul's conduct in cutting his hair to show that he was under a vow, and in hastening to Jerusalem to keep one of the Jewish feasts, proves that, although he insisted on the freedom of

shrewd, and shows a better appreciation of the real nature of the case than the special pleading of the town clerk. The town clerk's advice to the people, most of whom did not even know the reason why they were crying out, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians,' deserves more attention than it often receives. Making an uproar and acting with rashness are the very worst means we can take for advancing any cause. But it was not true that the craftsmen had no reason for dreading the effects on their trade, or 'craft,' of the Christian teaching. Demetrius seems to have understood the aims of the new faith pretty accurately. Dr. Paley has the following short passage, which expresses admirably the cause of all this uproar. The Christian religion 'denied without reserve the truth of every article of heathen mythology—the existence of every object of their worship. It accepted no compromise; it admitted no comprehension. It must prevail, if it prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every statue, altar, and temple, in the world.'

The conduct of Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen, as described in this chapter, is remarkably true to human nature. To this day men are only too apt to oppose great changes, not because they are convinced that evil results to the general public will arise from them, but because they are likely to clash with some of their own selfish interests.

A few passages of this chapter are scarcely rendered with sufficient accuracy in the Authorised Version to be intelligible without some explanation. Such are:—

1. 'The chief of Asia' (v. 31). This is really the technical name of certain high magistrates, 'Asiarchs.' That some of these were friends of St. Paul is a proof of the great success of his work in Ephesus.

2. 'Worshipper of the great goddess Diana' (v. 35). The word properly includes the idea of protecting as well as serving. This was the theory of relationship between heathen cities and their tutelary gods. The god protected the city, and the citizens defended the god.

3. Verse 38 has been translated as follows: 'The assizes are now going on, and there are such persons as proconsuls; let plaintiff and defendant plead against one another.'

For accounts of the temple and the image of Diana, see Conybeare and Howson's 'Life and Epistles of St. Paul,' chapter xvi., or Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible.'

LESSON 210.

Read Acts xx.

ALTHOUGH the uproar of which we read in our last lesson was quieted by the tact of the town clerk, the city was no longer a safe place for St. Paul to remain in. He had intended soon to visit Macedonia and Greece, and carried that intention into effect at once. No details are given of the circumstances of this visit; we may gather, from some hints which are dropped as it were by the way, that he went as far south as Corinth, and that only the plot of the Jews against his life caused him to return to Macedonia by land instead of sailing direct from Corinth to Palestine. On his return to Philippi, St. Luke, who, as already mentioned, wrote the book of the Acts, rejoined him after a separation of several years. This we gather from the use of the word 'we,' in the 6th verse, and onwards.

The plots of the Jews warned him that his life was in danger, and, besides this natural knowledge, he had supernatural intimations, which he calls the witnessing of the Holy Ghost, that some great trial was about to come upon him, probably at Jerusalem, whither he was bound. His interpretation of his own natural anxiety, and of the spiritual warnings which he received, was that his death was near. As he had a little time to stay at Miletus, a town on the sea-coast, not far from Ephesus, he sent a message, asking the elders of the Church in Ephesus to meet him there, that he might take what he believed to be his last farewell of them.

His speech, which fills the latter half of the chapter we have read to-day, is full of coincidences, both of thought and of expression, with his epistles. Especially we must notice the one thought which runs through the speech, namely, that he had done his work thoroughly, looking for no reward from man. If we remember that he had probably just left Corinth, and that in the Corinthian Church there was a party which accused St. Paul of interested and unworthy motives, we shall understand better how this speech, addressed to men who loved him and trusted him, must have been a deliverance to his mind. They knew, he tells them again and again, how he had acted, even in minute details of daily life; how 'these hands,' which we may suppose him to have held up, as was his habit in speaking, had ministered to his own necessities and those of his companions.

Of particular expressions we must notice two. He says that he does not count his life dear unto himself, so that he may *finish his course* with joy. These words were used in anticipation of a speedy death. We know that he lived at least ten years longer, but we

find, in the last letter he ever wrote, the Second Epistle to Timothy, words which are an echo of these: 'I have finished my course.' The moral lesson is one which cannot too strongly be insisted upon. God gives each of us certain work to do, just in the same way as a certain course is marked out for a man who runs a race. Now he cannot win the race who stops in the middle of the course; so neither can we obtain the reward which God has promised to His faithful servants, if we carelessly or idly leave undone the work He has appointed for us. Constant, earnest work for God all our lives long is the only worthy rule of life which we can follow.

The second expression we must notice carefully is the quotation—'the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Now if we look through all the four Gospels, we find passages which teach the same general truth, namely, the blessedness of charity, but none which St. Paul could have been quoting in these particular words. From this we learn an important lesson with respect to the Gospels themselves. None of them separately contains, nor do the whole four together contain, a complete history of all the sayings of Our Saviour. In the early times some sayings were remembered, and handed down by tradition, which for some cause or other are not included in any of the Gospels. One consequence of this fact is that differences between the accounts of the same event given by two Evangelists are not inconsistent with the truthfulness of both. One may have given one part, and another another part, of our Saviour's words; just as one part or another was impressed upon the writer as most important to be remembered.

LESSON 211.

Read Acts xxi.

THIS chapter contains the completion of the account of St. Paul's journey to Jerusalem, and records the circumstances under which he was arrested there, in consequence of a tumult raised by the Jews.

The history is so plainly given as to require but few comments. Those which are necessary may be noted separately.

1. The way in which St. Paul answered the entreaties of the Christian brethren at Cæsarea, and of those who had been his travelling companions from Philippi, shows his determination and force of character. The warning given by Agabus was not the first he had received of danger awaiting him at Jerusalem, but not even this certain definition of the form which the danger would assume could shake his purpose. He believed that it was his duty to go to Jerusalem, and no fear of consequences could deter him from performing it. Such examples of heroic virtue are

never out of date. They teach us to remember that, when difficulties and dangers come in the way of duty, any calculation as to probable consequences is out of place. The claims of duty must be regarded as absolute, not as comparative. In the past, brave and holy men have so regarded them, and this is one of the great reasons why their memories are still so fondly cherished and so powerful for good.

2. The next point to be noticed is the use of the word 'carriages' in verse 15. When the Authorised Translation was made, the word was employed in a very different sense from that which it bears now. Then it meant, not that which carries a man, but that which a man carries. The modern words 'baggage' or 'luggage' correspond to the old word 'carriage.'

3. The tumultuary violence of the Jews, assembled in Jerusalem, from all parts of the world, to keep the feast, has a close parallel in modern times. The times of the great feasts were always times of great excitement; the Roman garrison in Jerusalem was strengthened by detachments of soldiers from Cæsarea, and a strong guard was kept constantly under arms in the tower of Antonia, which overlooked the Temple courts, so that any disturbance could be immediately suppressed. This fact explains how it was that St. Paul was so speedily rescued from the infuriated crowd of Jews, who, there can be no doubt, would very soon have put him to death but for the interference of the Roman captain. Modern travellers constantly refer to this scene in their descriptions of the excitement and frequent disturbances which prevail in Jerusalem at this day, when multitudes of pilgrims, Latin, Greek, and Mohammedan, are collected in some of the Holy Places of that city.

4. Lastly, we must notice the impression which St. Paul's firm and courteous bearing produced at once upon the Roman captain. He thought that his prisoner was one of the many adventurers who about that time disturbed the peace of Judæa, and troubled, without seriously endangering, the stability of the Roman rule. When he heard St. Paul address him in pure Greek, he was surprised, and, answering courtesy with courtesy, allowed him to address the people. St. Paul's tact in choosing the common Aramaic (called in this passage, as generally in the New Testament, 'the Hebrew tongue') must also be noticed. Most of the assembled Jews below, who were collected in large proportion from the Greek cities of Asia Minor, would have understood him if he had spoken in Greek, but his choice of the language of Palestine made them feel at once that he was one of themselves, and disposed them to listen to him the more attentively.

LESSON 212.

Read Acts xxi.

THIS chapter contains an abstract of the speech which St. Paul, standing on the stairs leading from the court of the Temple to the Tower of Antonia, addressed to his fellow-countrymen. The speech itself is mainly a narration of events of which we have already read, and which have been explained in previous comments. Those explanations need not now be repeated, but we must notice, as illustrative of the wise tact of St. Paul, the manner in which he put the facts before his hearers. His choice of their native language made them feel that it was a brother Jew to whom they were listening, and this sense of brotherhood must have been deepened by the opening sentences of the speech. His education in the Jewish learning at Jerusalem, at the feet of the great teacher Gamaliel, is mentioned because that very fact would establish a presumption in his favour. A man who had had such advantages would not be likely to think lightly of the ordinances of 'the law of the fathers,' nor to swerve from those ordinances in any way except under the influence of the most overpowering evidence and conviction. Such evidence and conviction St. Paul declared he had in the vision which was granted to him on his way to Damascus. Again, in his statement of the events which happened at Damascus, he is careful to mention that Ananias, the Christian brother who came to him, had not renounced the Jewish religion when he adopted Christianity; he was still 'devout according to the Law,' and highly esteemed by all the Jews who dwelt in Damascus. Once more, he says that the trance or vision which he last describes, came to him as he 'prayed in the Temple'—a clear proof that he had not ceased to regard the Temple as a holy place, as indeed it is described in the Old Testament, a 'house of prayer.'

These are points which are important to anyone who wishes to realise the fine tact which marked St. Paul's character; they enable us to interpret correctly his meaning when he said that he became all things to all men, that he might win them to Christ. These words, we thus see, do not mean that he disguised the truth, in order to get his hearers to accept it, but that he considered carefully how he might put it before them in a light which should be at once bright, full, and welcome.

At the close of the chapter we read that St. Paul claimed the privilege of a Roman citizen, and that his claim was acknowledged without the slightest hesitation. A few words of explanation are necessary on this point.

1. The Roman citizenship was a right to certain privileges and

exemptions which belonged at first only to freemen of Rome, and of some other cities in Italy, but which, as the Roman authority was extended more widely, was conferred upon dwellers in other parts of the empire. It must be understood that this was distinctly a *personal* right. It is sometimes thought that St. Paul possessed the Roman citizenship because he was a native of Tarsus, which was a free city; but that is not the case. The citizenship was never granted to communities, only to individuals. At the time of which we are reading, there were two ways of procuring this right, by purchase and by descent. The chief captain is an illustration of the first of these ways, as St. Paul is of the second. One of his ancestors, scholars tell us, must have rendered some service to the Romans, in return for which he and his descendants had been enfranchised; that is, admitted to the privileges of the Roman citizenship.

2. Of the privileges of a Roman citizen, one of the most important and well-known was that he could not be subjected, except after a lawful trial and sentence, to any bodily indignity. If found guilty of an offence, the penalty for which was corporal punishment, he was formally divested of his citizenship before that punishment was inflicted. One of the old Roman laws declares that for a Roman citizen to be bound is a shameful thing, for him to be beaten, an unspeakable crime. This, we see very clearly, was the law to which St. Paul appealed when he said, 'Is it *lawful* for you to scourge a man that is a *Roman* and uncondemned?'

3. Such privileges, we might imagine, would soon be claimed even by persons who had no right to them, and we may wonder that the bare word of St. Paul was taken so readily. The explanation is found in the fact that the same laws which protected Roman citizens, decreed most terrible punishment to any person who should claim that protection without right. It is said that the claiming of the rights of citizenship by one who was not a citizen was almost, if not entirely, unknown, the penalty for false pretences was so severe.

St. Paul's conduct in claiming the protection of Rome at such a critical moment deserves some notice. We know that he was not afraid of danger or of suffering, if the suffering could be productive of good; but he would not undergo needless and useless torture, when he had the *right* to be exempt from it. He knew that the question between the Jews and him must be argued out, and resolved that it should be argued in the only court where he had any chance of a fair trial, namely, the court of the Roman Procurator.

LESSON 213.

Read Acts xxiii.

THE scene in the hall where the Sanhedrin, or Jewish council, met to investigate the charges against St. Paul, can readily be understood if we remember the peculiarities of religious belief of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In the argument used by the Pharisees, 'let us not fight against God,' we may probably trace a remembrance of the wise counsel given many years before by Gamaliel; the words, at all events, are almost the same.

It may be asked, How could St. Paul say that he was called in question of the 'hope and resurrection of the dead,' when, as a matter of fact, the accusation made against him by the Jews who seized him was that he had brought Gentiles into the Temple? The answer to this question is clear. The thought or suspicion that he had brought Gentiles into the Temple acted upon minds already prejudiced against him because of his previous teaching. It was, we may say, only like a spark falling on a charge of gunpowder; the immediate cause of the explosion is the falling of the spark, but the preparation for the explosion was made in the composition of the powder itself. The prejudice of the Jews against St. Paul was of long standing, and arose from the fact that he had been the boldest and most unwearied preacher of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. By skilfully referring, in general terms, to the one great Christian doctrine as to which the Sadducees and the Pharisees were at variance, and in which the latter believed, he enlisted a part of his audience in his favour, and divided his opponents by dissension among themselves.

The history of the last twenty or thirty years of the existence of the Jewish commonwealth is full of accounts of plots similar to that of which we have read in this lesson. The Jews who plotted against St. Paul's life were actuated, not by personal revenge, but by a mistaken zeal for religion. They were unconsciously fulfilling the prophecy made by Christ to His disciples: 'The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.'

The letter sent by Claudius Lysias to the procurator Felix deserves to be noticed as a specimen of the way in which a clever man, who was not altogether free from blame in the transactions he describes, could so represent matters as to turn them to his own advantage. It is worth reading carefully also as a specimen of an official document of the time, and as showing how little interest the truth or falsehood of the Christian teaching excited in the mind of a cultivated Roman soldier.

At the same time we must observe with what care the writer of the Acts describes everything that can possibly turn to the credit of the Roman captain. His kindness and courtesy to St. Paul are very strongly marked; as we read, we feel that St. Luke intended to describe, and has described, the conduct of a gentleman.

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LESSON 214.

Read Acts xxiv.

THE narrative in this chapter is so simple and straightforward as to need no comment. But there are two passages, the 16th verse and the 25th and 26th verses, which, in a few words, suggest a great contrast, namely, that between the character and ruling motives of two men, the apostle St. Paul and the procurator Felix.

The 16th verse—'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men'—gives us in St. Paul's own words a statement of the ruling motive of his life. How true this statement was we know from all we have read of the apostle's history.

What a contrast to this is presented in the brief glimpse of the inner life of Felix, given us in the 25th and 26th verses! There we read: As Paul 'reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore he sent for him the oftener and communed with him.' Here we have set before us the character of a man entrusted with the government of an important province, who was not above taking bribes, and who, in the hope of receiving them, stooped to the injustice of keeping in prison without cause a man whose sincerity had touched and alarmed, though it had failed to awaken, his conscience. This character, given by St. Luke, is in exact agreement with what we know of Felix from other sources. Tacitus, the celebrated Roman historian, gives a very brief but very distinct account of his character. He says, 'Felix, in all cruelty and lust, exercised the power of a monarch with the mind of a slave.' When St. Paul stirred his conscience by preaching those virtues in which Felix was most wanting, he trembled; but the trembling of fear led to no reformation. He deadened the reproaches of conscience, and lulled it again to sleep by putting off the discussion: like the invited guests in the parable of the Great Supper, he rejected the Lord's invitation, and we have no reason to believe that it was ever again repeated.

NOTE.—It is generally believed that during the two years

spoken of in verse 27 of this chapter St. Luke was with St. Paul, and that under St. Paul's general supervision the Gospel of St. Luke and the earlier part of the Acts of the Apostles were then written at Cæsarea.

LESSON 215.

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Read Acts xxv.

THE two years of St. Paul's imprisonment at Cæsarea seem to have had no effect in mitigating the bitter hostility with which the Jews pursued him. They seized the opportunity presented by the appointment of a new procurator, who had not yet grown accustomed to the peculiar relations between the Roman and Jewish authorities, to attempt once more to get St. Paul into their power. They thought that if the new procurator were brought round to their views, they might kill St. Paul on his way to Jerusalem. It was only the plain, blunt honesty of the procurator Festus that prevented the success of their scheme. His words—'It is not the manner of the Romans'—show that he felt contempt for the priests and others who were seeking as a favour from him the surrender of the life of an uncondemned prisoner.

St. Paul's appeal to Cæsar is the only point in this chapter which needs explanation. The right of appeal to the Emperor was one of the privileges of Roman citizenship. The Emperor's court, presided over by himself, was supreme in all causes and over all persons within his empire; but only citizens could claim the privilege of appeal to it. The appeal was not like that which is now called by the same name in England. In our course of law the appeal is not made to a superior court until the decision of a lower court has been given. But the Roman citizen's appeal could suspend the trial in a lower court at any stage. Only two words needed to be spoken, in any remote province of the empire, and the person on his trial was at once secure, for the appeal could not be refused. By the uttering of these words St. Paul removed his case at once from all Jewish interference, and the priests became powerless. At Rome, and there alone, could the case be proceeded with. The appearance before Agrippa was not a trial, but simply an examination from which something might be deduced for the information of Festus, and through him of the Emperor.

LESSON 216.

Read Acts xxvi.

[N.B.—I venture to recommend to the teacher that this chapter should be treated as a recapitulatory lesson on St. Paul's life.

Several topics which have been treated in preceding comments may here be brought forward again: for example, faith in the resurrection (verses 6-8), St. Paul's faithfulness to conscience (9, 19), &c.]

The close of this chapter gives us a remarkable illustration of the persuasive courtesy which was so conspicuous a feature of the character of St. Paul. He did not allow the rudeness of Festus to ruffle his temper or disturb his presence of mind. How beautifully St. Paul's conduct illustrates the words of Isaiah—'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength'! St. Paul's example may well guide us. How often do we not forget the interests of the truth we desire to assert, in our anger with our opponents; how often do we not rouse their passions, rather than attempt to persuade their reason! When we feel ourselves irritated by opposition, let us recall the noble courtesy of St. Paul before Festus and Agrippa. If we could only remember always how *blinding* anger is, we should be far more careful than we are not to arouse it. If Festus and Agrippa and their suite remained unconverted by the Christian doctrines, St. Paul could at least feel satisfied that he had put the truth before them in its most attractive colours. No angry reply had marred the beauty or force of his dignified address. St. Paul's words made his hearers listen to the Gospel in their most favourable mood, and it was only the levity and frivolity of their minds that prevented them from benefiting by the opportunity.

LESSON 217.

Read Acts xxvii.

THIS chapter is extremely interesting because of the great detail and accuracy with which the voyage and the shipwreck are described. Nearly every verse may be illustrated by quotations from ancient or modern travellers. It is also very useful to us as illustrating further some truths which have already been brought before us by the accounts we have read of the various dangers and adventures experienced by the apostles.

Frequent reference has been made in our past lessons to the dangers which arise from our timidity, and to the many occasions on which the dread of punishment, of ridicule, or of blame, drives even well-meaning persons from the right course. We have also seen how the Bible teaches us the one sure source whence we may derive courage and endurance under trials. These thoughts should be recalled to our minds now, because the account of St. Paul's voyage which we have just read sets before us in very striking colours the contrast between that kind of daring which really arises from mere thoughtlessness, and the unwavering courage which is derived

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from a firm faith in the providence of God. The kind of thoughtless daring referred to is not at all uncommon, and is often mistaken for courage. Indeed, uneducated and thoughtless persons often become far too indifferent to the risks by which they are daily surrounded. Many a mine, for instance, has been set on fire by the carelessness of a miner, whose life, and the lives of multitudes of his fellow-workmen, have been thereby sacrificed. It was not because death had lost its terrors for him, but from sheer heedlessness, that he caused the disaster. This kind of thoughtless daring, moreover, too often vanishes when dangers are so near as to force themselves on the mind. True courage, on the other hand, rises to the occasion.

We must notice that, while the vessel in which St. Paul made the voyage was anchored in the place called 'The Fair Havens,' it was St. Paul who desired the sailors not to put to sea again. He pointed out that the season was too far advanced for them to expect to complete their voyage with safety. Probably the seamen laughed at him for his caution, and mistook, as people so often do, thoughtful prudence for weak cowardice. At all events, they put to sea again, and the storm came on; and now let us mark the change. The sailors, who had been full of rashness when they were safe in port, were terror-stricken when they found themselves in real danger; while St. Paul alone was calm and confident. Again, when the vessel was anchored just before the wreck, the Roman soldiers were too much alarmed to take any precautions for their safety. They were about to allow the sailors to desert the ship; in which case, as they did not understand how to manage her, all on board must have perished. But St. Paul never lost his coolness and presence of mind. He pointed out that the soldiers had at their command a ready and simple means for preventing the sailors from abandoning them, namely, cutting away the boats.

All through the past history of St. Paul's life we have seen him in every trial thus brave, calm, and self-possessed, because ever mindful of the presence, the wisdom, and the love of God. The tempest had no terrors for him, for he felt, as the Psalmist has so beautifully expressed it, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

LESSON 218.

Read Acts xxviii.

WITH this chapter, which tells us of St. Paul's arrival in Rome, and of his passing two years in that city in an honourable kind of custody, the direct history of the Apostle ends.

From many references made in the Epistles written by St. Paul during this period, it appears that his preaching of the Gospel in Rome was very successful; many even of the subordinate ministers of the imperial court were converted to the faith of Christ. During his imprisonment he endured many hardships, being at times left almost friendless, but still his courage never failed, his trust in God never deserted him. Among those who comforted and ministered to him in his imprisonment, he mentions with very special praise Luke the beloved physician, and one Onesimus, a Colossian slave. But what happened when the two years came to an end? To answer this question we must trust to some extent to the guidance of ecclesiastical history, and to the conclusions drawn by scholars from some incidental references in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. It will be understood that what follows is set down as the simplest and most reasonable arrangement of fragmentary materials. It is agreed by all students that at the end of the two years referred to in the last verses of the Acts—that is to say, about five years after his arrest at Jerusalem—St. Paul was set at liberty. His appeal was heard by the Emperor Nero, and he was discharged because the accusation brought against him was, in the eye of the Roman law, frivolous or invalid. The date usually assigned to this discharge is A.D. 63. His movements during the remaining five years of his life are very uncertain. It seems probable that from Rome he hastened at once to Asia, where the state of the Churches had for some time been such as to cause him considerable anxiety. From Asia he is believed to have turned his steps westward. Clement of Rome, a contemporary writer, asserts that he preached righteousness throughout the whole world, and ‘travelled unto the extreme bounds of the West.’ This is the only part of his life where we can find a place for such a journey as these words imply. Again he travelled to the East, for he was in the East when towards the end of his life he wrote the Epistles to Timothy and Titus. Of these the Second Epistle to Timothy was the last—the last letter, indeed, that he ever wrote. He was still busy in going from place to place, and preaching what he knew to be the word of life, when he was a second time arrested and taken to Rome. Whatever may have been the second charge brought against him, either it was better supported than the first had been, or else, which we have some reason to believe, the feelings of the Roman authorities towards Christians had changed; at all events, he was condemned and executed at Rome in the early summer of A.D. 68.¹

His character has been so plainly set before us in the history which we have read, that we need not now attempt to point the

¹ This sketch of the life of St. Paul after his first release is mainly

derived from Professor Lightfoot's lectures on the Pastoral Epistles.

moral of his life. Let it suffice to say that the whole Christian world has ever regarded him with reverence and love, and, to show how nobly he endured to the end, let us conclude by quoting almost the last words he wrote: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.'

LESSON 219.

The Sufferings and Triumphs of the Early Christian Martyrs.

THE main object of the following lesson is to illustrate the character of Christianity, by showing what has been its influence upon Christ's faithful followers. For this purpose it is best to examine the history of the Church in the times of her adversity, when the sacrifices imposed on her adherents afford us a guarantee for the earnestness and depth of their convictions. As soon as any religion is professed by the majority, or by the influential classes in a country, it necessarily attracts to its ranks many thoughtless and selfish persons, who range themselves under its banners in careless indifference, or from interested motives. In the confusion which then arises between its faithful and faithless followers, it becomes increasingly difficult to estimate its genuine force in regulating the conduct of men. We will, therefore, conclude these lessons with a short account of the sufferings and triumphs of the early Christian martyrs.

The word martyr is derived from a Greek word, meaning a person who bears witness to some fact or truth, and it has been exclusively devoted in our language to persons who suffer death for their opinions, because they are very rightly considered as the most honourable of all witnesses.

We have read in the New Testament of some martyrdoms, but they were caused by the conflict of Christianity with the hopes and expectations of the Jews. The martyrdoms we are now about to consider arose from its warfare with paganism.

General Causes of the Persecutions of the Church.

At the time when the Bible history in the Acts of the Apostles ends, the Roman empire was of vast extent, completely encircling the Mediterranean Sea. It comprised all that part of the continent of Europe which is south of the rivers Danube and Rhine, part of Britain, the parts of Africa and Arabia which are between the

sandy deserts and the Mediterranean Sea, all the islands in that sea, Palestine, Phœnicia, and Asia Minor. The empire, in short, included, with one or two exceptions, all the countries into which Christianity spread during the first three centuries of its existence.

The supreme ruler of this great collection of nations was the Emperor, who, while he still observed certain republican forms and laws which were very closely associated with the remembrances of the old liberties of Rome, was really almost absolute, and who delegated his great powers, subject to but few limitations, to the lieutenants or governors who represented him in the conquered provinces. Occasionally an emperor, feeling oppressed by his vast powers and cares, divided them with one or more colleagues, whom he voluntarily associated with himself in the government.

The system of government is well described in the language of Gibbon—the distinguished historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire—as ‘an absolute monarchy disguised by the forms of a commonwealth.’ But although the emperors were absolute in so far that there were no substantial constitutional checks imposed on their will and authority, they and their lieutenants were not able wholly to disregard the wishes of their subjects. On the contrary, they were frequently compelled to make concessions to the desires of the people or the soldiery. As the subjects of a despotic government are not trained in judgment and self-control by a continuous interest in public affairs, their demands are nearly always shortsighted, and often selfish and cruel. The character of the Roman Government, subject to such capricious influences of the armies and the populace, was, as we shall see, a frequent source of danger to the Christians.

The extended dominions and political system of the Roman empire as just described were little varied in any way during the long period of the persecutions. All the evils inseparable from a system of absolute government were illustrated in the history of the times in the most frightful manner and on an unparalleled scale. The peace and happiness of the whole of the then civilised world depended on the character of one man, who was often a fierce, uneducated ruffian, raised to the throne at the caprice of his predecessor, or of bands of licentious and pampered soldiers. Nothing in all history can be sadder than the accounts we read of how the greatest powers for good or evil ever exercised by a single person were thus frequently placed in the hands of the weakest and most unscrupulous of men.

Such were the general circumstances of the empire in which the obscure, self-denying religion of Christ had to struggle, not only for existence, but spiritual and moral supremacy.

The customary policy of the Roman Government was to tolerate all religions except the few which were considered injurious to good order or public morals. This wide spirit of toleration has by no means always characterised Paganism, but in the case of the Empire its prevalence is easily explained. The religious opinions of many of the ruling and wealthy classes were so vague and uncertain that they had no zeal for them, and no desire to force them upon others. A still stronger security for toleration lay in the fact that there were so many varieties of religion among the nations conquered by the Romans that any attempt to force a common form of worship on all would have endangered the peace of the empire. The Roman Government was at first disposed to tolerate Christianity as freely as the other religions of its subjects. We have read, for instance, in the Acts of the Apostles, how the Roman officer, described as the Town-Clerk of Ephesus, discouraged the coppersmiths when they wished to persecute the apostles, and also how quietly Felix, the Roman Procurator, listened to St. Paul's explanation of his faith. This state of things was changed as soon as Christianity had spread sufficiently to make its real aims known. The heathen then perceived that it was not like the various forms of Paganism in the empire, a religion contented to exist with others under a system of common toleration. The followers of the new faith looked upon themselves as sent to carry it to the uttermost parts of the earth, to procure for it universal acceptance, and not to rest so long as a single false god received homage to which the One Supreme Being is alone entitled. This uncompromising spirit was the main cause of the outbursts of Pagan hatred which Christianity called forth, and of the fitful persecutions to which it was so long exposed.

Let us, then, consider the various ways in which Christianity offended the people, and afterwards why the Government—sometimes reluctantly, but often with a good will—departed from their general policy of toleration, and persecuted the professors of the new faith.

In the first place, we find from ancient writers that the Christians were not only condemned by the Pagans for attacking the national gods, but, strange as it may seem to us, they were accused of acknowledging no God at all. The purely spiritual nature of their unseen God, who dwelt not in temples made with hands, was above the comprehension of most of the Pagans. As Gibbon has so well expressed it: 'The pure and sublime idea which the Christians entertained of the Supreme Being escaped the gross conception of the Pagan multitude, who were at a loss to discover a spiritual and solitary God, that was neither represented

under any corporeal figure or visible symbol, nor was adored with the accustomed pomp of libations and festivals, of altars and sacrifices.' Thus, the persons who were actually laying down their lives for the glory of God were exposed to the charge of being atheists. The wounded reverence of the superstitious Pagans would not, however, have made them so hostile had it not been mingled with other and much stronger feelings. The rites and worship of Paganism were closely entwined with the daily life and habits of the people; the public rejoicings for victories, peace, or plenty; the public mournings for defeats, pestilence, or famines; the public games and amusements; the chief events of family life, such as births, deaths, and marriages, were all celebrated by rites which partook of an idolatrous character, in which Christians could not conscientiously take part. The withdrawal of the Christians from the numerous gatherings in which their fellow-countrymen took so much interest exposed them to the charge of being unsociable and unpatriotic. It was in times of general distress that the isolation of the Christians excited the greatest anger in the people. The heathens believed that their gods were not only powerful, but very revengeful and sensitive to slights, and that the favour a nation might expect to receive at their hands largely depended on the attention and offerings they received from it. The people consequently readily attributed great national calamities to the anger which the insults and neglect of the Christians had aroused in the Pagan gods. Nothing could exceed the cruel fury of the populace on these occasions. They clamorously demanded from their rulers the sacrifice of the Christians, and human ingenuity was often taxed to invent the tortures by which their desires might be satisfied.

Last, but not least, among the causes of the persecutions were the selfish fears of the Pagan priests and of the large numbers of other persons whose means of gaining a livelihood depended wholly on the multitude of the heathen rites and ceremonies. They saw clearly that by the spread of Christianity 'this their craft was in danger,' and they were always on the watch for opportunities to play artfully on the superstitious fears of the people in order to awaken their animosity.

Having now examined the sources of popular hatred towards the Christians, let us consider the motives which explain the conduct of the Government.

The Government, always anxious as to the maintenance of its authority, looked with jealous fear on any changes which could be supposed to affect either directly or indirectly its influence or prestige, and thus lessen the spirit of obedience among the people. The spread of Christianity appeared to the Roman rulers to clash

with their policy in many ways. In the first place the unbending character of the Christians in matters of religion and conscience seemed to them inconsistent with the ready obedience due to the civil authorities, and they therefore feared that converts to the new faith might be less submissive subjects. Then the Church possessed from the earliest times an episcopal organisation, including bishops and orders of clergy, subject to rules and customs of her own. Now, the Roman Government was morbidly jealous of all societies and institutions not under the direct control of the State. It was a matter of principle with the Christians to obey their civil rulers so long as the latter did not—to use the striking words of a later Gothic sovereign—‘by claiming dominion over the conscience usurp the prerogative of God;’ but the Government failed to perceive the nice but clear distinction drawn by the Christians between the affairs in which they owed obedience to Cæsar and those in which they owed obedience to God. Thus, although there was really no reason to doubt the loyalty of the Christians, the Government more or less suspected it. The new faith was also in another way a source of uneasiness to the Roman rulers. All governments not resting on a popular basis look with dread on any new ideas which are likely to disturb the habits of thought and customs of a nation. Absolute governments know that long-established religious sanctions and old usages have a strong hold on the minds of a people, and may, when skilfully used, prove a valuable aid in the preservation of order. The heathen religions were artfully employed by the Government for this purpose. The Roman emperors associated themselves closely with the worship of their people, and thus endeavoured to surround their authority with a kind of sanctity. The emperors were at the head of the priesthood, and had the title of Pontifex Maximus, or Chief Priest. They offered public sacrifices on the altars of the gods, regulated the rites of public worship, and were occasionally raised by their successors to divine rank, when their statues were worshipped by the people. The emperors therefore looked with dislike on the new faith, which aimed directly at destroying the superstitions which served as buttresses to their authority, and with them many habits and customs which tended to keep their subjects contentedly in their wonted paths. When, lastly, we find that, in the early days of the persecutions, few of the wealthier classes were acquainted with the beauty and holiness of the Christian faith, or perceived that the restraints on conduct which it enforced would, if generally submitted to, have been among the best securities for public order, we shall understand why the Roman Government was at times very hostile to the Christians, and even when not so, often shrank from incurring any risks by intervening to

protect them against the consequences of the superstitious hatred of the more ignorant heathen. In short, then, the Roman rulers sanctioned the persecutions of the Christian Church partly in deference to the wishes of the people, and partly because they desired to put down a religion which they despised, and which, in their unenlightened eyes, tended to loosen the bonds which held the empire together.

The spirit of persecution was, however, sometimes discouraged and restrained by the humanity of the more able emperors, whose firm hold on the respect and affection of their subjects raised them above any weak fears for the maintenance of their authority. As a general rule, subject to exceptions, the Government of the day was less violently hostile to the Christians than was the mass of the common people. Laws were from time to time passed punishing with death the persistent profession of Christianity, but they were allowed to fall into abeyance for long periods, and rarely put into force except when circumstances arose which led the priests of the old religions or the people to demand the interference of their rulers.

Account of the Persecutions.

THE first great persecution of the Christians was one of those ordered to appease the alarms and rage of the Roman populace. It took place about the year 64, in the reign of the Emperor Nero, a man naturally very weak, who was so much corrupted by absolute power, and of such levity of disposition, as to be capable of almost any crime or folly. At that time a great fire destroyed a large part of Rome, including some of the most venerated of the ancient monuments. The emperor's character was so bad that he was believed—rightly or wrongly we do not know—to have wantonly kindled the fire and to have shown great indifference while it was burning. In order to turn these suspicions from himself, Nero pointed to the Christians as responsible for the calamity, declaring that they were the incendiaries, and that it was sent by the gods, who had been outraged by the profanity of the Christians, and by the introduction into the empire of a strange and above all a hostile religion. The persecution of the Christians which followed was fierce and cruel to the last degree. Men and women were sewn up in skins so as to resemble wild beasts, and then turned out for the dogs to worry. The most cruel of the tortures was that of covering the victims with a dress smeared with wax, pitch, and other combustible matter, and then setting fire to them and leaving them to burn like torches in the public places, with a stake fixed under the chin to keep them upright.

This persecution was followed at intervals by others, which continued to the early part of the fourth century, to only a few of which need we here refer.

One of the most noted of the persecutions took place in Bithynia, a province of Asia Minor, early in the second century of the Christian era. It was chiefly attributable to the jealousy of the priests and votaries of the old religions, who loudly complained that their altars and sacrifices were deserted for the new worship; and these complaints show how rapidly Christianity must have spread in that province. The Christians were dragged before the tribunal of the governor Pliny, who mercilessly put to death all persons who were not ready to refute the accusation of holding the new faith by sacrificing to the ancient gods. As he felt perplexed by the novelty of the charge, he wrote to the Emperor Trajan for special instructions, stating that he could detect nothing in the proceedings of the Christians further than 'a culpable and extravagant superstition;' but he adds, 'I had no doubt that, whatever it was they professed, contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished.' In this last remark we may see an illustration of the dislike which the Roman rulers felt to the unbending character of the Christians in questions of conscience. The answer of Trajan, who was one of the greatest and best of the emperors, directed Pliny not to seek out supposed criminals, not to act on any of the anonymous charges, which were at times very common in the Roman empire, and to use his powers with moderation when Christians were brought before him and legally convicted of holding the strange religion. An edict of Trajan's immediate successor, the Emperor Hadrian, punished with severe penalties any persons who were found guilty of falsely attributing to their fellow-citizens the crime of Christianity. These documents are alike evidences of the laws which existed for the punishment of avowed believers in the new faith, and of the efforts which some of the more humane emperors made to limit the operation of these ordinances.

Many of the Christian martyrs were at various times sacrificed in the amphitheatres—places associated in so many ways with the struggle between Christianity and heathenism that a description of their character and uses will not be out of place. Some of them were so substantially built that the ruins remain in a comparatively perfect state to the present day. The largest of them was, as might be expected, at Rome, the capital city of the empire, and is now called the Coliseum. It was begun in the year 72, and is the most striking and beautiful ruin in Rome. It has in the interior a flat, oval space, 287 feet long by 180 feet wide, called the arena, around which are seats for the spectators, rising like steps one behind the other to the height of 157 feet, that is, to a height more than three

times that of an ordinary three-storeyed house. In this enormous building more than 80,000 persons could be seated. It had no roof, but it was covered when in use by a large awning. The building was devoted to various kinds of sports and games, most of them more or less cruel.

Sometimes the arena was used for chariot races, sometimes it was filled with water and used for imitating naval battles; but the favourite exhibitions were fights for life and death between men called gladiators, who were armed with spears, swords, or other dangerous weapons. If a gladiator overcame another without killing him in the struggle, the conqueror appealed to the spectators, who decided whether or not the vanquished man should be put to death, and indicated their decision by a movement of their thumbs. The gladiators were often professional men, who fought for the rewards given to the conqueror, but sometimes captives taken in battle were put into the arena and compelled to fight with each other. At other times the fights were between men and wild beasts, which were artificially infuriated by hunger and torture, or between animals only, as, for instance, between an elephant or a tiger, or a lion and a rhinoceros. When the Coliseum was dedicated by the Emperor Titus the games lasted one hundred days, and it is said that over 5,000 animals were slaughtered. The delight of the Roman people seemed to be in proportion to the number of men and animals killed in these games. On great occasions the Emperor was present in state, attended by his great officers and the Vestal Virgins, the most sacred of the Roman priestesses.

It is impossible for us to realise the horrors of the scenes in the Coliseum and the other great amphitheatres, when not only men but even delicate and beautiful women and children were exposed to cruel deaths. In the arena the martyrs were either face to face with the wild beasts which were to devour them, or in presence of the fires by which they were to be burnt. Around and towering high above the victims were crowded the thousands of spectators, their faces glowing with the kind of wild fierce excitement which takes possession of men who have thoroughly abandoned themselves to the enjoyment of some cruel and bloody pastime. But in the great majority of cases all the terrors of the scene failed to shake for an instant the unfaltering courage of the martyrs. Sometimes breathing lofty defiance to their persecutors, but generally in the impressive serenity of prayer, they met a fate from which a few words of recantation would have saved them, feeling, to borrow St. Paul's words, that they were 'persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed, having a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Horrible as these scenes were, they were beyond measure blessed in their fruits. The Christians in dying remained the conquerors. The nobler and more thoughtful of the heathen could not but admire the constancy of the martyrs, and many of them were led on reverently to enquire as to the sources whence they derived their faith and courage. Whenever such enquiries were made, it was found that the Christians were as a rule leading singularly blameless lives, were supported by conceptions of God and by religious hopes which satisfied the noblest longings of man's nature, and were obeying precepts admirably adapted to secure peace and good order in the community.

Not only was the way prepared for the final conversion of the Roman empire by the daily increase in the number of adherents of the new faith, but also by the changes which took place in the opinions of the more enlightened and spiritual heathens. The idea of one Supreme God took a more decided place in their creed. Celsus, a heathen writer, in a controversy which he had with a Christian called Origen, in the early part of the third century, appears to take great pains to show that his religion was not inconsistent with the elementary principle of Christianity, the unity of the Supreme God. The following is an extract from the translation of his writings:

'We also can place a Supreme Being above the world, and above all human things, and approve and sympathise in whatever may be taught of a spiritual, rather than material adoration of the gods; for with the belief in the gods, worshipped in every land, and by every people, harmonises the belief in a Primal Being, a Supreme God, who has given to every land its guardian, to every people its presiding deity. The unity of the Supreme Being, and the consequent unity of the design of the universe, remains, even if it be admitted that each people has its gods, whom it must worship in a peculiar manner, according to their peculiar character; and the worship of all these different deities is reflected back to the Supreme God, who has appointed them, as it were, His delegates and representatives. Those who argue that men ought not to serve many masters impute human weakness to God. God is not jealous of the adoration paid to subordinate deities; He is superior in His nature to degradation and insult. Reason itself might justify the belief in the inferior deities, which are the objects of the established worship. For since the Supreme God can only produce that which is immortal and imperishable, the existence of mortal beings cannot be explained, unless we distinguish from Him those inferior deities, and assert them to be the creators of mortal beings and of perishable things.'¹

¹ Milman's 'History of Christianity,' Book ii. chap. viii. (vol. ii. p. 182).

In the year 218 an event took place which proved a great blow to Paganism. The troops encamped in Syria revolted, and after killing the Emperor, who was with them, they raised to the throne Bassianus, a priest in the temple of the Sun at the Syrian town of Emesa. He took the name of Heliogabalus or Elagabalus, the title under which the sun was worshipped in that city. The man thus raised to supreme power was among the vilest of all the emperors, without one redeeming virtue. He degraded and insulted the purest and least objectionable forms of heathen worship in Rome, and introduced into the city the worship of his own god, accompanied by a variety of rites and ceremonies of the most extravagant and licentious nature. These disgusting exhibitions he compelled the highest officers of the State to attend. There can be no doubt that the insults heaped by the emperor on the old established religions, combined with the horrible accompaniments with which the new form of heathen worship was daily exhibited, did much to shake the already crumbling edifice of Paganism, and to set forth by contrast the beauty of the rising Christian faith.

On the murder of Elagabalus by the soldiery, after a few years' reign, his cousin Alexander Severus was raised by the army to the throne. He was a mild, moderate, and virtuous, but rather weak sovereign, who did his best to correct the increasing corruption of the Pagan world. His religion was of a very wide and mystical character, and he had been made acquainted with at least some of the characteristics of Christianity by his mother, who had conversed with the Christians in Syria. He included Abraham and Christ, with several heathen deities, among the number of his household gods, and extended not only toleration but favour to the Christian Church. During his reign it underwent much outward change. In the earlier days of the Church the religious assemblies had been held under the shelter of privacy chiefly in the Christians' homes. Now, however, Christian buildings for public worship began to rise in different parts of the empire, and Christian bishops were received at Court. But though Christianity thus made great strides in public favour, the days of its persecutions were far from ended. Again and again, after the death of Alexander Severus, the heathens made desperate efforts to crush the new faith by force.

We must here notice one characteristic which made its appearance in the later persecutions, and that is the increasing number of the Christians whose courage failed them in the presence of the magistrates, and who consented to purchase their safety by sacrificing to the Pagan gods. This change shows that the increase in wealth and the prosperity of the Church had produced the not uncommon effects of these gifts, and had obtained for her the outward adherence of many persons who were not really earnest in their

convictions. The heroic conduct of many of the Christians under every trial conclusively proved, however, that among her true followers there was sufficient faith and courage to carry the Church triumphantly through the remaining period of her persecutions.

The last conflict between Paganism and Christianity took place in the beginning of the fourth century. At that time the empire was distressed by many troubles, her frontiers were attacked by enemies on all sides, and the Christians were, as on former occasions, looked upon as responsible for the misfortunes of the country. The Emperor Diocletian, overwhelmed by the weight of his absolute powers in such critical times, had associated with himself several colleagues in the government. One of these, named Galerius, had been originally a herdsman. He was a good general, but uneducated and brutal, and without any of the wisdom of a statesman. Under his influence Diocletian was reluctantly induced to sanction a general persecution of the Christians. It proved to be one of the most general and systematic of them all, and as the Christians were now everywhere numerous, it caused a greater amount of suffering than any previous one. At first it was less cruel in its character than the former persecutions, inasmuch as it stopped short of the punishment of death, but the Imperial Government ordered all the property of the churches to be confiscated, the buildings devoted to public worship to be pulled down, the sacred books to be delivered up for the purpose of being publicly burnt, all assemblies for Christian worship to be prohibited, and Christians of rank and distinction to be degraded and excluded from all offices of public trust. Roman citizens who adhered to the proscribed faith were deprived of those cherished rights which were the best securities from oppression, while Christian slaves were declared incapable of obtaining their liberty by the customary means. The whole Church was virtually outlawed by a variety of disqualifications which rendered its condition intolerable. The failure of these measures to destroy the Church, and the inert resistance on the part of the Christians, which occasionally broke out into acts of overt violence, irritated the Government and Pagans to the last degree, and the persecution became more and more cruel with every year of its duration, until at last the persons of the Christians were exposed to all kinds of tortures and sufferings. Almost immediately after the commencement of the persecution, the Emperor Diocletian voluntarily abdicated and retired to a life of seclusion and quiet. On his retirement his colleague Galerius became sole master of all the Eastern part of the empire, and carried out the persecution with relentless energy; but, so far as the objects of its promoters went, it proved as complete a failure as all the others. After it had lasted nearly ten years Christianity showed no signs

of vital decay, and at length the Emperor Galerius issued from his death-bed an edict, to which he obtained the assent of two of his colleagues, permitting the free and full exercise of the Christian religion in all their dominions, and asking the Christians to pray for the prosperity of the emperor and the empire. The edict was as follows:

‘Among the important cares which have occupied our mind for the utility and preservation of the empire, it was our intention to correct and re-establish all things according to the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans. We were particularly desirous of reclaiming, into the way of reason and nature, the deluded Christians, who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers, and, presumptuously despising the practice of antiquity, had invented extravagant laws and opinions according to the dictates of their fancy, and had collected a various society from the different provinces of our empire. The edicts which we have published to enforce the worship of the gods, having exposed many of the Christians to danger and distress, many having suffered death, and many more, who still persist in their impious folly, being left destitute of any public exercise of religion, we are disposed to extend to those unhappy men the effects of our wonted clemency. We permit them therefore freely to profess their private opinions, and to assemble in their conventicles without fear or molestation, provided always that they preserve a due respect to the established laws and government. By another rescript we shall signify our intentions to the judges and magistrates; and we hope that our indulgence will engage the Christians to offer up their prayers to the Deity whom they adore for our safety and prosperity, for their own and for that of the Republic.’¹

We have no means of knowing the influences under which Galerius issued this decree, but it, no doubt, represents the feelings of many of the Pagans of the day. They perceived at length that it was impossible to crush the new faith by violence, and, being compelled to tolerate it, they desired to see a kind of compromise established. The Christians were to be allowed religious freedom, and in return they were asked to give a pledge of their loyalty and patriotism by praying to their own God for the prosperity of the empire. This they could do without any violation of their conscience. The edict is also very interesting as an illustration of what has already been said in explanation of the feelings of the governing classes to the Christians. The reference in it to the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans shows the dislike of the Government to the changes which Christianity involved in the habits and customs of the people; while the reference

¹ Gibbon's ‘Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,’ chap. xvi.

to the 'various society' collected from the different provinces of the empire betrays its jealousy of the ecclesiastical organisation of the Church. The great point in the edict, however, is the admission on the part of the stern, proud Government that the persecution had proved a complete failure.

With the issue of this edict the persecutions finally ended in all except the eastern portions of the empire. Syria and Egypt were under the rule of Maximin, a furious tyrant of the most degraded type. He continued to persecute the Christians in order to obtain favour with the Pagan party, and to protect himself from the general hatred which his many acts of individual oppression were likely to arouse. At last a terrible famine occurred in his dominions, consequent on the failure of the periodical rains, and it was followed, as is often the case, by a pestilence, in which the miseries of the people culminated. In the midst of the general distress the self-denying, forgiving virtues of the Christians shone forth in their brightest and most attractive colours. They tenderly nursed the sick, regardless of all danger from infection, and generously distributed their scanty food among the starving, without distinguishing between the members of their own faith and the Pagans who had so lately been among their bitterest enemies. The admiration and gratitude of the Pagans, combined with the idea that their calamities were associated with the persecutions, turned public opinion in favour of the Christians, and the tyrant had, just before his death, to issue an edict, which secured them full liberty of conscience, and restored to them their confiscated property.

The joint administration of the empire by several emperors and princes, which Diocletian had instituted, resulted, after his death, in bitter civil wars between the rival rulers, into the details of which we need not enter. They involved the empire in terrible miseries, which were aggravated by the attacks of foreign enemies. These troubles temporarily ended in the year 324, by the reunion of the empire under Constantine the Great, who, in every post he had filled, had always shown favour to the Christians, and who, after wavering doubtfully for some time between the purer forms of Paganism and Christianity, finally openly and fully embraced the latter religion. The exact date of his conversion is a question much disputed, as he was not baptised until immediately before his death. With the reign of Constantine the use of the cross as an instrument of torture and executions ceased, and from an object of terror it became the recognised symbol of Christianity. The emperor's statue was represented as holding it, and it was engraved on the arms of the troops, as well as displayed upon their principal standard, called the Labarum.

One of the great councils of the Christian Church, at which

representatives were assembled from all parts of the empire, was held in the year 325 at Nicæa, in Bithynia, under the personal presidency of the emperor. It was one of the most memorable and interesting assemblies in the annals of the Church, and was called together to discuss some of the religious questions as to which the theologians of the time were divided. It was attended by many persons who bore on their bodies the marks of the tortures they had undergone in the last persecution. The creed known as the Nicene Creed was settled at this assembly.

Although the example of Constantine, and the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the State, added greatly to the number of its avowed adherents, as well as immeasurably to its influence and prestige, Paganism still continued to be the religion of a large part of his subjects.

Constantine's nephew, the Emperor Julian, who succeeded Constantine's sons on the throne, relapsed into heathenism. He had been carefully instructed in the Christian faith, but though a prince of many virtues, he had a fatal tendency to intellectual pride, and, unhappily, the divisions in the Church and the examples of many members of his own family, who professed Christianity, were calculated to prejudice him against it, by setting its practical character before him in a very false and odious light. The apostasy of such a man at a critical period in the history of the Church was a most deplorable event. He did not, however, renew the violent persecutions, though he treated the Christians with harshness and injustice, and grew more and more bitter against them as his short reign drew to a close. His favourite orator represents him as believing 'that neither fire nor sword could change the faith of mankind; the heart disowns the hand which is by terror compelled to sacrifice. Persecutions only make hypocrites, who are unbelievers throughout life, or martyrs, honoured after death.' Under these professions, however, Julian covered a good deal of uncharitable feeling, and his conduct was not in strict conformity with their tone. He deprived Christians unfairly of many posts of trust, especially in connection with education, and is accused of having neglected precautions to protect their lives in the tumults which arose between them and the Pagan populace. Apart from his treatment of the Church, his reign, considering the age he lived in, was a model of moderation and justice. He fell in battle in the year 363, the serene dignity of his dying hours being well worthy of a purer faith. He was the last Pagan emperor, but Paganism did not die out until late in the fifth century. It lingered longest in the rural districts and villages, where, the intercourse between man and man being less frequent

new ideas make slow progress; hence, indeed, the name Pagan, which is derived from a Latin word meaning a village.

We have now seen how the principles of Christian faith and duty were made known to mankind by the examples of our Saviour's early followers. The daily virtues of their obscure lives, and their heroic endurance when called upon by persecution to give public proof of the sincerity of their convictions, had slowly and surely told their story. They had secured the triumph of the Church in every part of the empire, notwithstanding all the bitter opposition which the superstitious prejudices and selfish fears of the people and the jealous dislike of the Government had arrayed against them.

In conclusion, let us consider another side of these persecutions. They afford some of the most striking illustrations to be found in history of the difficulty which even comparatively good and wise men have in judging impartially questions which appeal strongly to their feelings. The martyrdoms were, no doubt, chiefly prompted by low, selfish motives, but it is equally certain that some of the Romans who approved them were upright men according to their lights, to whose prejudiced eyes the new religion seemed strange and impious. That such men should have so mistaken the true character of Christianity may well impress upon us the great care needful in forming opinions on questions which threaten to disturb our cherished convictions and sentiments. Above all, their errors illustrate the terrible responsibility which we wrongfully assume, if we endeavour to force our opinions on others in matters as to which they have a natural right to be left free.

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