

The Lessons of the Third Quarter, 1896.

To the Scholar.—Study the lesson carefully, turning up all the marginal references, and review the "Daily Portions." Then close your Bible and answer in writing the questions on the lesson without accepting aid from any quarter after you have begun to write. If you cannot come to Sabbath school, fill out one of the "Excuses for Absence" and send it, with your written answers, to your teacher by some friend, or by mail, and you will receive credit for the work done as if you had been present. If your excuse is satisfactory, you will not lose in record of attendance.

THE CHARACTER OF DAVID.

The character of David has been very differently judged. In his own day he was the idol of his people; to the subsequent prophets and priests he was the model king; to the later Jews his kingdom typified the kingdom of the Messiah, of whom he was himself the type. His piety, his zeal for Jehovah, his tender compassion, his generous sympathy, his bold enterprise, his dauntless courage, entitle him to admiration. He is recognized as the worthy leader of the chosen people, and, next to Abraham, the father of the faithful, comes David, the man after God's own heart. Some writers have slighted David's claim upon the enthusiasm of the church and sought to emphasize his faults so that they might sneer at his religion. But the best refutation of this detraction is the Bible record, so free from flattery, so candid and comprehensive, and yet leaving an impression that its subject was a hero, a man cast in a rare mould. His sayings and doings fill well nigh three entire books of the Old Testament, while references to him are found upon almost every page of the Bible. He comes before us in every light—as shepherd, musician, champion, courtier, fugitive, chief, warrior, king; what life could be more varied? In a more domestic way he appears as an obedient son, respectful younger brother, modest youth, ardent lover, faithful friend, tender husband and indulgent father. All along the line of his development, private and public, his piety is marked. The psalms he wrote attest the depth of his love for God and his unwavering confidence. His character was essentially the same from the days when under the glistering stars, as boyish poet, he sang, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19), until the day when as aged monarch it was said of him, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended" (Ps. 72). He was by no means perfect. He was compassed with infirmities; but he mourned his defections and was pardoned. The struggle with his passionate nature, strong and proud, was kept up incessantly, and, though oft defeated, he conquered at last. The sins for which he is to-day mocked were precisely those of an Oriental king. He was the man after God's own heart, not in his sins, but in his repentance and in his earnest effort after a higher and purer life. (*Schaff-Hertzog Cyclopaedia*).

DAVID AND THE PSALMS.

The spirit of God acting through his great natural gifts, and using his diversified experience of life, originated in David a new form of inspiration. The law was the revelation of the mind, and, in some measure, of the heart, of God to man. The psalm is the echo of the law, the return current set in motion by the outflow of the divine will, the response of the heart of man to the manifested God. There had indeed been traces of hymns before David. There was the burst of triumph which the daughters of Israel sang, with timbrel and dance, over Pharaoh and his host; the prayer of Moses the man of God (Ps. 90), so archaic in its tone, bearing in every line the impress of the weary wilderness and the law of death; the song of the dying law-giver (Deut. 33); the passionate psalm of Deborah, and some briefer fragments. But, practically, the psalm began with David; and though many hands struck the harp after him, even down at least to the return from the exile, he remains emphatically "the sweet psalmist of Israel."

The psalms which are attributed to him have, on the whole, a marked similarity of manner. Their characteristics have been well summed up as "creative originality, predominantly elegiac tone, graceful form and movement, antique but lucid style," to which may be added the intensity of their devotion, the passion of divine love which glows in them all. They correspond, too, with the circumstances of his life as given in the historical books. The early shepherd days, the manifold sorrows, the hunted wanderings, the royal authority, the wars, the triumphs, the sin, the remorse, which are woven together so strikingly in the latter, all reappear in the psalms. The allusions, indeed, are for the most part general rather than special, as is natural. His words are thereby the better fitted for ready application to the trials of other lives. Of the whole collection, there are about forty-five which we may attribute with confidence to David. Notwithstanding recent criticism, we hold the superscriptions "a psalm of David," &c., to be of great value. They are at least as old as the collection itself; the septuagint translators found them there; the synagogue preserves no traditions to explain them; they prove their trustworthiness by their appropriateness, and are most common in the confessedly most ancient portion of the psalter. (*Dr. Alexander Macaren*).