

Lesson Commentary.

LESSON VI.]

[MAY 7, 1882.

SUFFERERS BROUGHT TO CHRIST.

MARK vii. 24-37.

THE ministry of Christ was largely spent among sufferers; from the nature of the case it could not have been otherwise. Of his thirty-three miracles whose story is recorded, twenty-four were wrought upon physical sufferers. Men brought to him the blind and the crippled. The lepers of the mountains cried in anguish for help. The insane, whose dwellings were the tombs, and who slept beside the dead, screamed in his hearing. The deaf and dumb appealed to him, with their silent language, for pity. Messengers were sent from beds of sickness, and from chambers of death. From tomb and dwelling, from wayside and mountain, in Judea and in Galilee, he heard the continuous clamours and moans of grief and despair.

Taking the story of the Syrophenician woman, and of the man both deaf and dumb, as types of all he met, we shall consider two important truths.

I. *The province of human suffering.* That suffering is a result of wrong-doing, near or remote, there can be no doubt. Man reaps just what he sows; and sometimes the harvest has increased the seed sown an hundred fold. It is also just as true that one soweth and another in the third or fourth generation, or one still later, reapeth the harvest. Suffering—by the law of nature and from revealed truth—is a result of sin; but not always, perhaps not often, of the personal sin of the sufferer. Human suffering is not the result of divine vengeance. "Who did sin; this man or his parents?" asked the disciples of Christ, as they pointed to the blind man. Neither the man has sinned nor his parents, was the sacred reply. The suffering world clings to a comforter who has suffered, since no one but a sufferer can sympathize with the suffering. The pierced hand is the tenderest in blessing. The face that has been spit upon, and the form that has been mocked, is strongest help in our weakness. If the Christ had come in any other way than

as a "man of sorrows" we might have reasonably distrusted his mission. As a Saviour, it is written, he was made perfect through sufferings; and it is just as true that by his stripes we are healed. Tried, tempted, despised, insulted, the Christ has fellowship with us. He who prayed in agony in Gethsemane under the waving branches of the olive-trees; who was betrayed to the midnight mob; who endured the mockery of so-called justice; who suffered on Calvary—has fitted himself for the fellowship of the heaviest sufferer.

II. *The divine treatment of the sufferer.* The method of giving aid in every instance differed from all others; thus observe his methods in these two narratives of the text. Throughout the whole country he was known as the helper of the helpless. The multitudes had sought his assistance, and not in vain. He had proved his sympathy to many who were not of Israel.

Before such a helper knelt the anxious mother. From no other source could hope come; and she was urgent. Her religion was a degraded idolatry. Her family was of the accursed stock long before condemned. She made known her request; yet Matthew declares, "He answered her not a word." "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil;" but still he was silent. It was an importunate request. The place was disturbed with her supplications. At length, out of mere shame at such an outcry, the disciples joined with her, that so she might leave them alone, when he replied to them, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Was there no pity in his heart? Her quick ears caught the seemingly hopeless words, and she cast herself at his feet and worshipped him with the cry, "Lord, help me!" The sacred silence is about to be broken, but with no words of comfort to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." "Truth, Lord," said the suppliant, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table."

The silence and the seeming severe rebuke were no more needed. The sacred face