

The Quiet Hour.

Third Quarterly Review.

S. S. LESSON. (Read Deut. 8: 1-20 and the lessons for the quarter.)

GOLDEN TEXT:—Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God.—Deut. 8: 18.

Lessons from the Review.

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Lesson 1 gives a sad picture of man's short-lived gratitude and swiftly failing faith. The words "murmurings" and "murmurs" occur seven times in it. It was but six weeks since leaving Goshen, and already the benefit was forgotten, and the people thought they were going to die of hunger. They were but too like ourselves, quick to forget benefits and cherish distrust. The long-suffering of God is as conspicuous in this lesson as the short-lived thankfulness of man. It is Moses and Aaron that say so much about the murmurings. God does indeed speak of them, but only as moving him to display patient dealing in sending the manna. What a wonderful revelation of infinite love that it is moved to supply wants even when these are made matter of complaint instead of prayer! True, he had withdrawn the "glory" into the wilderness, but it drew near again, and promised quails at even and manna in the morning. He puts murmurings to shame by benefits. The manna was sent day by day "to prove them." We, too, have our bread from heaven as truly as Israel had, and it comes, after all, in much the same fashion, and that for the same purpose,—that our dependence on him may be tested, and that blind eyes may see the continual tokens of God's working. We, too, live from hand to mouth, and round our tents an unseen Hand showers the bread of the day in its day.

Lesson 2 gives the so-called first table of the law, dealing with duties which are religious in the narrowest sense; but the glory of the Decalogue is that, while the tables are two, the law is one, and that it fuses religion and morality at a time when they were supposed to be entirely separate. Significantly the commandments are mostly prohibitions. "Thou shalt not" is needed in a sinful world. Negative commandments are the rough rind which guards the ripening fruit. The deliverance is basis of all, so even then a redemptive act was the foundation of God's claim on men, and grateful love was the motive of obedience. The first commandment forbids other gods to Israel, and is based directly on that redemptive act. The second forbids idols, the fascination of which was all but irresistible at that stage of history, and in subtler forms besets us too. Its reason annexed goes deep, making the love of God the life of religion, and the motive for keeping the Commandments. The third is directed against frenzied heathen invocations, and also against profane swearing; but it strikes at "vain repetitions," not unknown even in Christian worship, and against all irreverent attitudes towards the manifested character of God. The fourth appoints the Sabbath, and is the one bit of ritual in the code. It is here based on the divine rest, while in Deuteronomy it is based on the deliverance. Since it stands among the "religious" duties, the rest is to be a devout rest. Worship is to the soul what rest is to the body.

Lesson 3 deals with duties to men, and

the glory of the Decalogue is its binding religion and morality together as soul and body. Morality comes second, religion first. That is God's order, and ethics independent of religion: have little imperative force. The two sets of duties are linked by the fifth commandment, for in the old world parental reverence was almost religion and in the new world we may adapt John's question, and ask, "He that loveth not his father whom he hath seen, how shall he love his Father whom he hath not seen?" The remaining five are all negative, all but the last are curt, all are without reasons annexed, for such plain duties need none. All deal with acts which all laws regard as crimes with the same exception. All are negative. They shield life, family, property, reputation. The tenth goes deeper, touching the heart. Covetous desire sins against neighbors, and is the bitter fountain of murder, adultery, theft, and slander.

In Lesson 4 we have to distinguish the parts played by the people and by Aaron. They suggest making "gods," for they wish to drag him in. Their proposal abjures God and deposes Moses, for they seek for gods "which shall go before us." That seems to define their sin as being a formal abjuring of Jehovah, and so a breach of the first commandment, not merely a desire to worship him under a visible symbol, and so a breach of the second. Aaron tried to direct an impulse which he should have stamped out, weakly attempting to turn the orgy into "a feast to the Lord." That is a besetting sin of many in these days. He cuts a sorry figure in his vain effort to salve over sin by a fine name. Moses' self-sacrificing love is as noble as his flashing anger. The eagle and the dove is one! His willingness to sacrifice himself cannot be accepted without infringing on God's righteousness. Thus what Moses offered to do, and his sacrifice, does not shake, but establishes, God's righteousness.

The description of the tabernacle in Lesson 5 significantly begins with the innermost shrine, for the whole records how God meets with man, rather than how man meets with God. The only contents of the holiest of all is the ark, not even the mercy seat being specified. That brings out the great peculiarity of the empty shrine, with no image of the deity worshipped there, as would be found in other temples. The ark contained the tables of the law, and these revealed God's nature as well as man's duty. The contents of the second or priests' court expressed, when taken together, various aspects of the life of the priestly nation. The altar of incense in the center taught that that life was to be primarily and essentially a life of prayer, while the candlestick on the one side, and the table of showbread on the other, taught that its manward aspect was to be that of the light of the world, and that the activities, with their results, were all to be laid in God's sight, offered to and to be judged by him. The outer court contained the altar of sacrifice, teaching that sin must be taken away by atonement before, as priests, men can enter the inner court; and the laver for washing teaching that after expiation comes cleansing "without which no man shall see the Lord."

Lesson 6 teaches that God is to be worshipped as he commands, not otherwise, and that nearness to God demands greater sanc-

tity, and involves severer punishment. The same fire which accepts the legitimate sacrifice consumes the sacrilegious offerers. God is infinite mercy, but infinite justice too. Aaron is forbidden to mourn, because he is anointed with the sacred oil. He who has the anction of God's spirit should dwell above agitations in the land of peace. He should also stand in no need of the excitement of "strong drink," which dulls the perception of moral distinctions, and takes away power of teaching Israel.

Lesson 7 contains the regulations, not only of Israel's march, but of the Christian pilgrimage. In the latter, as in the former, there is divine guidance, which is to be docilely followed. Obedience is to be immediate and unconditional, at whatever time the cloud moves or stands still. In it, too, human help is to be combined with God's direction, as Moses sought for Horab's practical knowledge, though the pillar led the march. In it, too, God's presence is to be invoked both to hallow toil and to sweeten rest.

In Lesson 8, cowardice and faith are in sharp contrast. The spies all agree, in regard to the facts, that the land is good, and that the conquest will be hard. But Caleb and Joshua look beyond the facts to God, who is with them. Their courage is not due to their blinking the dangers, but to their trust in him. The people, panic struck, meditate revolt. To stand in front of a great opportunity's open door and to recoil from entering in because of "many adversaries," stamps a man as ignoble. Forty years' wandering is the penalty of that hour of refusal.

In Lesson 9 the great gospel truth that there is life for a look is symbolically illustrated. Two points in the symbol are laid hold of by Jesus to Nicodemus: first, that his cross is his throne, on which, lifted up, he is set forth to the world; second, that the look of faith expels the poison, and communicates a life which is free from sin.

The prophet promised in Lesson 10 is not an individual, but the order. It is the defense against illegitimate methods of knowing or influencing the future. The prophet's characteristics are that he is raised up by God, that he is "one of yourselves," that he is like Moses in that he has direct communications from God, and that therefore he is God's representative, and speaks God's word. All these characteristics reach their highest reality in Jesus, of whom the prophetic order, as a whole, prophesied by its very existence.

In Lesson 11 the spirit of the law is summed up. The essence of it all is to "love Jehovah thy God." And that love is based upon his self-revelation in his loving dealings with us. Obedience follows love, as its test and result. Again, the law is a blessing because it ends the weary quest after a reliable guide to conduct. We need not climb to heaven, or traverse oceans, to find what we ought to do. It has its echo in the heart which responds to the command to love God, and recognizes that it is the first and great commandment. Further it lays before men, with merciful plainness, the issues of obedience or disobedience, life or death. It brings with it solemn responsibility for our personal choice. We have to choose whether we live or die. Not to choose life is to choose death.

Lesson 12 suggests that the sin of Moses demands severer punishment because he is nearer to God. He dies, as most leaders and reformers do, leaving unfinished work, but he was blessed beyond most of such, in that he did get a sight of the fair land to