

The Quiet Hour

The Nobleman's Son Healed.

Time.

Soon after the last lesson place; still in Cana of Galilee. References—Mark vi., 4; Luke iv., 24; John ii., 23; iii., 2; ii., 1, 11; Deut. xvi., 16; I. Cor. i., 22.

Explanatory Notes.

V. 44, "own country" there may mean Judea, "the home of the prophets"; 45, the feast of the passover, already named. II., 23, 46, Nobleman-Greek Basilikos, "Royal official" of Herod Antipos, who, though really tetrarch was given his father's title of Basileus (King). The title has nothing to do with birth, it is uncertain whether he was a civil or military officer. 48, "Signs and wonders." The word miracle in 54 should be 22. The works of Jesus were never mere wonders. Note strong negative, "Ye will in no wise believe." 52, "Began to amend," the father had faith, but not to the full height of possibility; he expected a gradual, but received for his son an instantaneous cure; 53, He had faith before, but now, a fuller faith; thus we are constantly reminded that faith is a living, growing process.

Exposition.—In our last lesson we saw Jesus mingling with the festive throng, and increasing the joy of wedding guests, now we meet Him as the healer of the sick, the helper of those who are in sorrow. He has already met with coldness and even hostility in Judah; there was a little gleam of brightness on the way north, as He proved the receptivity of Samaritans; and now He is again in Galilee, where most of His mighty works are to be done, and His great words to be spoken. In Nazareth, His northern home, He has had also to apply the proverb that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country. But Jerusalem, that had rejected so many prophets, soon began to teach Him the bitter truth of that sad saying. Another thing that soon began to grieve the heart of Jesus was the eagerness of men for "wonders" and their blindness to the "signs." As Paul said afterwards, sensation seeking is a great weakness of the Jews. We ourselves are prone to it; so we cannot reproach them; but must rather take warning. We run after the startling outside thing and forget the spiritual truth which God is seeking to

impart through many common signs. Jesus is ever ready to give help to our need, though He will not minister wonders to mere curiosity. If we have faith to bring our burden to Him we shall find signs that the spirit can discern and the heart interpret. Who knows but that the main purpose of our sorrow is to fit us to receive the real signs of the Christ.

These sorrows came to all, "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," in the palace, as well as in the cottage, the blow of bereavement falls. The "nobleman" is in danger of losing his child, the father's heart is oppressed with grief. Jesus can sympathise with such grief even when He has little patience with vulgar craving for signs. The father came to Jesus in sorrow; he went home in hope. There has been many such coming and going since. The way to answer the rebuke of Christ is by earnest pleading for His presence. Not argument, or excuse, is the way to meet His righteous reproof, but by the cry, "Come down ere my child die." "O, Lord, give me the sign of Thy presence." If our prayer is real we are in some measure prepared to learn that there is something higher than the bodily presence of the Christ. His word can act where it seems not to be. In the father's absence a strange blessing came upon the boy, the burning fever, which racks the brain and consumes the blood, leaves him. What blessed tidings that has been many a time in the home when the life of the boy or girl seemed to hang quivering in the balance, "the fever left him." Then there was a new beginning of life and hope. We do not see Jesus in these circumstances, but let us remember that He is near. Father and son, separated for a little while, are touched by the same word of power. What a blessing in that thrice repeated word, "Thy son liveth." First, it is the work of promise; second, it is the announcement that fact corresponds to the promise; third, it is the joyful echo of faith. The man believed as a condition of the blessing, and he believed as a result of it. Thus spiritual life grows under the tender ministry of Jesus. The blessing comes to the father through the channel of natural affection, which God would not have us undervalue or despise. The human father is a type of the divine, and human love is honored by God. Then the blessing which comes to the father's heart travels the whole circle of the family. "His whole house." Christianity is not a bare narrow individual-

ism, it fits in with family feelings, and works with social ties. The family should still be the unit of the congregation, the home should be a centre of spiritual life, a miniature church, a fragment of God's great kingdom. This should still be a work of union, "and all his house."

If the Lord Should Come.

If the Lord should come in the morning
As I went about my work,
The little things and the quiet things
That a servant cannot shirk,
Though nobody ever sees them,
And only the dear Lord cares
That they always are done in the light of the sun,
Would he take me unawares?

If my Lord should come at noonday,
The time of the dust and heat,
When the glare is white, and the air is still,
And the hoof-beats sound in the street,—
If my dear Lord came at noonday,
And smiled in my tired eyes,
Would it not be sweet his look to meet?
Would He take me by surprise?

If my Lord came hither at evening,
In the fragrant dew and dusk,
When the world drops off its mantle,
Of daylight like a husk,
And flowers in wonderful beauty,
And we fold our hands and rest,
Would His touch of my hand, His low command,
Bring me unhopd-for zest?

Why do I ask and gesticulate?
He is ever coming to me,
Morning and noon and evening,
As I have but eyes to see.
And the daily load grows lighter,
The daily cares grow sweet,
For the Master is near, the Master is here,
I have only to sit at his feet.
—Margaret E. Sangster.

A Movement for the Evangelization of China.

The London Christian says that Rev. J. Hudson Taylor, director of the China Inland Mission, believes that the Lord's time has come for the making of a special effort to "preach the Gospel to every creature" in China. This must be done by itinerant workers, both native and foreign; and as the existing work of the mission is growing so as to constantly need reinforcements, it is evident that for a new and widespread forward movement many new workers must be called and sent forth of God in answer to prayer.

It is proposed to form a special itinerant evangelistic band, composed of consecrated young men, who are willing for Christ's sake to devote five years of their lives to itinerant preaching in specified districts, without marrying or settling down until after this period of service. The work will be hard, and will call for much self-denial, but "in keeping of his commandments there is great reward." (Psa. 19, 11).

Mr. Taylor has arranged for the commencement of this work in the province of Kiangsi. Central stations in each district will be put in charge of experienced missionaries, who will guide the younger workers in their studies of Chinese and in their evangelistic efforts. Two evangelists and two Chinese helpers will usually journey together.

International Sunday school lesson for February 5th: John iv., 43-54. Golden Text: "Jesus said unto him: thy son liveth, and himself beheld and his whole house," 53.