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Second Quarter.

Lesson X. June 5. Ex. 16: 4-12.

THE MANNA.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life.—John 6: 35.

JOURNEYINGS OF THE ISRAELITES. When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, if, as is probable, the crossing took place at the Gulf of Suez, they were in the vicinity of Ayun Musa, the Wells of Moses, where they could find plenty of water with which to start on their journey through the desert. They then went southward three days, in the wilderness of Shur (*i.e.*, of "the wall"), the wilderness beyond the great wall mentioned in the last lesson. In this parched and thirsty condition they came to *Marah*, and, bitterly disappointed in finding water unfit to drink, they burst out in loud and fretful murmurings. But Moses, at the Lord's command, made the waters fresh and sweet. Their next station, till to the southward, was Elim, where were 12 wells and 70 palm trees. Their next encampment was by the Red Sea. This is not mentioned in Exodus, but in Num. 33: 10, 11. From this place they entered the Wilderness of Sin, where to-day's lesson begins.

PLACE OF THIS LESSON. The northern part of the Wilderness of Sin, at a fountain now called Murkha, about half-way between the head of the Gulf of Suez and its junction with the main body of the Red Sea. The best and most recent authorities find the Desert of Sin in a long plain that borders upon the Gulf of Suez, running from near Ras Zelimeh, probably the station by the Red Sea (Num. 33), to the extremity of the peninsula at Ras Muhammed. The meaning is *mire, clay;* and if, as is probable, the wilderness stretched along the shores of the Red Sea, the reedy and miry character of a portion of it may have suggested the name.

I. TRIALS AND TROUBLES BY THE WAY. Just one short month ago, the Israelites were singing songs of triumph; only one month has passed since they had experienced the goodness and power of God in a stupendous miracle of deliverance, which has comforted God's people for more than 3,000 years; and we now find them full of complaints and murmurings and crying to go back to Egypt and slavery, because they sat by the flesh-pots, and could eat their fill, while they were almost starving in freedom.

OBSERVE (1) how soon the people forgot what God had done for them, and they had reason to believe he would do again.

2. One reason of this was that they looked rather to Moses than to God.

3. They needed these trials to teach them about God's power and goodness, and to lead them to put their trust in him. Without trials their life would have been a failure, and all that God had done would have been in vain.

4. When God leads us into trials, he always shows the way out. If we rush into them foolishly, and against his will, we must suffer.

II. THE PROMISE OF BREAD FROM HEAVEN. 4. *Then said the Lord unto Moses.* The complaints were directed against Moses, and therefore the Lord makes known to him first the way of relief. Whatever God did was through human instrumentality. *I will rain bread from heaven.* This refers, of course, to the manna, which was given for the first time on the following night (ver. 13-15). *A certain rate every day.* The quantity sufficient for one day's consumption shall be gathered each day. *That I may prove them.* In the very manner of giving this heavenly gift, God was continuing their probation. "Their patience, faith, dependence, and thankfulness of spirit were constantly put to the test in their present experience." *Whether they will walk in my law.* It was a test of obedience, like the tree in the garden of Eden.

5. *On the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in.* From this it appears that the manna was not eaten in the form in which it was brought in. It was first bruised in a mortar, or ground in a mill, and then baked into bread. This process, whatever it was, was to be performed on the day before the Sabbath. *It shall be twice as much.* They should collect and prepare a double quantity, as stated in ver. 22.

6. *Moses and Aaron* now communicate the benignant design of the Lord to the people. *At even.* The evening of that day. *Then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you,* etc. The Israelites had charged Moses and Aaron with bringing them out of Egypt, as if from their own motion. Moses, therefore, here assures them, on the other hand, that they should soon have evidence that it was Jehovah who had brought them out of the land of bondage.

7. *In the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord.* This refers not, as some suppose, to the visible manifestation of God in the pillar of fire, which is called "the glory of the Lord" in ver. 10, and which the people saw, not the next morning, but that same day; but, as the parallelism of the verse shows, to the manna which was found the next morning. *He heareth your murmurings against the Lord.* God knows all your needs, and will supply every want gloriously.

8. *This shall be.* You will know that God hears your cry, and you will see the glory of God.

III. THE GLORY OF THE LORD. 9. *And Moses spake unto Aaron.* Vers. 6 to 8 describe the earlier conference between Moses and the people. Now there is to be a summons to all the people to appear in some open space near where the pillar of cloud usually stood. *Come near before the Lord.* Into the presence of the pillar of cloud, through which "the Lord's glorious presence was manifested, and which for the present constituted the Shekinah, or habitation of the divine Majesty."

10. *They looked toward the wilderness.* In the direction in which they were journeying, whither the cloud had probably moved in advance of the congregation. *The glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.* An unwonted glowing fiery brightness appeared in the guiding pillar, which on ordinary occasions presented to the eye merely an opaque, towering mass of cloud, in which the divine Majesty was supposed to dwell, and did dwell.

IV. THE QUAILS. 11. *And the Lord spake.* Rather, had spoken, as related in the previous verses. The promises are repeated in ver. 12, to introduce the story of its fulfilment, which immediately follows.

12. *At even ye shall eat flesh.* That very evening, "between the evenings," from three o'clock till sunset, six o'clock, a great flock of quails came up and covered the camp. The flesh is palatable, and not unwholesome when eaten in moderation.

V. THE MANNA. The manna came the next morning, as promised.

The people called this bread "manna" (ver 31).

Each one was to gather enough for himself and his family, and no more. Some, being greedy or lazy, gathered more, and attempted to keep it till the next morning, contrary to express command, and it bred worms. Greediness is always a real failure, and breeds evils in the soul. The law here was, as an example to all times, that every one should have enough, and none should have more than he needed. One great object of this daily supply was to teach them the great truth in the Lord's prayer, —"Give us day by day our daily bread." We are to trust in God each day; each day we are to see him as the giver of every good; we are to labor and use as well as to receive. Thus they were taught faith, thankfulness, industry, economy, and brotherly love.

On the sixth day a double supply was sent, so that they might rest on the Sabbath. This double portion kept two days. Thus, at the very beginning of their new life, the great institution of paradise was brought to their minds, and the duty of keeping the Sabbath impressed upon them. This was essential to their spiritual life, and to their training as true children of God.

Grinding the Diamond.

The poor sufferer lay in severe pain on her bed. It was really twenty years since she had known a well day. More than half that time since she had walked a step; and nearly two years since she had sat up. Her limbs were jerked by spasms; her back had deep sores on it from lying so long; and when ever one was relieved by a new position of the body another would be made. She never complained, and the cheerfulness with which she endured all this from day to day, and from year to year, was a matter of amazement to all. Her friends who saw the Bible always lying near her knew well from what spring she drew her water. They said it was one of the darkest providences they ever witnessed.

One night as the sufferer lay sleepless from terrible pain, she began to look back upon the past. What a wreck life seemed, dating from her bright school-days! What mystery that she must be so helpless and such a sufferer, while her school-companions could walk and move and act and enjoy life! What was the object of her heavenly Father in putting her into this slow, hot, long-continued furnace? As she lay there thus communing with herself the room seemed suddenly to fill with light, and a beautiful form seemed to bend over her. His face was gentle and full of pity. She was not at all frightened, nor deemed it strange that He was there, though she was aware that she never saw Him before. "Daughter of sorrow," said he, in a voice soft as the zephyr that first rocks the rose on its stem, "art thou impatient?" "No; but I am full of pain, and I have been so long a sufferer that, I see no end to it, nor can I see why I must suffer thus. I know that I am a sinner, but I have hoped that Christ's sufferings, and not mine, would save me. Oh! why does God deal thus with me?"

"Come with me, daughter, and I will show thee."

"But I cannot walk."

"True, true! There, gently, gently!"

He tenderly took her up in his arms and carried her away, far away, over land and water, till he sat her down in a far off city, and in the midst of a large work-shop. The room was full of windows, and the workmen seemed to be near the light, each with his own tools, and all so intent upon their work that they neither noticed the new-comers nor spoke to one another. They seemed to have small brown pebbles which they were grinding, shaping, and polishing. Her guide pointed her to one who seemed to be most earnestly at work. He held a half-polished pebble, which was seen to be a diamond, in a pair of strong iron pinchers. He seemed to grasp the little thing as if he would crush it, and to hold it on the rough stone without mercy. The stone whirled and the dust flew, and the jewel grew smaller and lighter. Ever and anon he would stop, hold it up to the light and examine it carefully.

"Workman," said the sufferer, "will you please tell me why you bear on and grind the jewel so hard?"

"I want to grind off every flaw and crack in it."

"But don't you waste it?"

"Yes; but what is left is worth so much the more. The fact is, this diamond, if it will bear the wheel enough, is to occupy a very important place in the crown we are making up for our king. We take much more pains with such. We have to grind and polish them a great while, but when they are done they are very beautiful. The king was here yesterday, and was much pleased with our work, but wanted this jewel in particular should be ground and polished a great deal. So you see how hard I hold it down on this stone. And see! there is not a crack or flaw in it. What a beauty it will be!"

Gently, gently the Guide lifted the poor sufferer, and again laid her on her own bed of pain.

"Daughter of sorrow, dost thou understand the vision?"

"O, yes, may I ask you one question?"

"Certainly."

"Were you sent to show me all this?"

"Assuredly."

"O, may I take to myself the consolation that I am a diamond, and that I am in the hands of the strong man who is polishing it for the great King?"

"Daughter of sorrows, thou mayest have that consolation; and every pang of suffering shall be like a flash of lightning in a dark night revealing eternity to thee; and hereafter thou shalt run without weariness, and walk without faintness, and sing with those that have come out of great tribulation."—*The Rev. John Todd, D. D.*

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The Flyon the Pillar.

One of the striking passages in the work of a celebrated philosopher, describes the thought which occurred to him of the inscrutable schemes of Providence, as he saw in a great cathedral a fly moving on one of the pillars. "It requires," he says, "some comprehension in the eye of an intelligent spectator to take in at one view the various parts of the building, in order to observe their symmetry and design. But to the fly, whose prospect was confined to a little part of one of the stones of a single pillar, the joint beauty of the whole, or the distinct use of its parts, was inconspicuous. To that limited view, the small irregularities on the surface of the hewn stone seemed to be so many deformed rocks and precipices."

That fly on the pillar, of which the philosopher spoke, is the likeness of each human being as he creeps along the vast pillars which support the universe. The sorrow which appears to us nothing but a yawning chasm or a hideous precipice, may turn out to be but the joining or cement which binds together the fragments of our existence into a solid whole! The dark and crooked path in which we have to grope our way in doubt and fear, may be but the curve which, in the full daylight of a brighter world, will appear to be the necessary finish of some choice ornament, the inevitable span of some majestic arch!—*Selected.*

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