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issue which Rome presses upon them. Only a thorough-going evangelical theology, faithful to the revealed will of God, and having for its great central and governing principle the supremacy and sufficiency of the one only Mediator between God and man can resist the assaults of unbelief and the usurpations of anti-Christian error.

The Sunday School.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

11th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, AUG. 24, 1884.

BIBLE LESSON.

The Plague Stayed. 2 Sam. 24; 1

The grief of David over the death of Absalom turned the victory into mourning, and the people stole back into the city like a defeated army. The king shut himself up, repeating the mournful cry for his son. At length he was roused from his grief by Joab, who declared that, if he persisted in the course he was thus pursuing, his friends would abandon him. David resumed his place in the gate of Mahanaim, and the people again gathered around him. In response to the appeal of Zadok and Abiathar, the tribe of Judah invited the king to cross the Jordan, and meet him on his return at Gilgal. Every step of his progress was marked by magnanimity, and all his friends were rewarded with ample gifts (xix. 1-40). The joy of the king's return was disturbed by the angry jealousy of the rest of the tribes against Judah for beginning the movement for the king's return without them. Judah, as more nearly related to David, appears to have claimed a more special interest in his person and restoration to the throne. The other tribes of Israel, as constituting the bulk of the nation, claimed a greater interest in the person of the king. The result of these conflicting claims was a serious altercation between the chiefs of the several clans, in which we are told, "The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel" (xix. 41-43). Intestine feuds were the result. The fierce tone of Judah provoked the old animosity of Benjamin; and Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite, "blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel." Great numbers of those who had followed Absalom obeyed this summons; and this new rebellion assumed a most serious aspect. The command of the king's army was given to Amasa, and, when he proved unequal to the crisis, to Abishai. In this emergency, the daring energy of Joab, although he had been superseded in the chief command, was again called into exercise, and again succeeded. He first assassinated Amasa, and then, assuming the command of the army, pursued Sheba to Abel; which town he so closely invested, that the inhabitants, to save themselves, slew the traitor, and threw his head over the wall to Joab, who thereupon drew off his men. Thus was the rebellion quelled, and Joab took his former place as captain of the host (xx. 1-26). Three years of famine afflicted Israel about this time. Encouraged by this condition of things in Israel, the Philistines made an effort to regain a portion of their ancient supremacy, but without success (xxi. 1-22). David's kingdom was now strongly re-established; and all appearances were favourable to a long continuance of prosperity to the nation. To this time probably belongs the eighteenth Psalm, recorded also in the history (xxii. 1-51). Its title is, "A song spoken by David to Jehovah in the day that Jehovah delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." Sheba's rebellion was the dying effort of Saul's party.

I. THE PLAGUE.

After all the troubles through which David had passed, and all the dangers he had escaped, he still continued to direct the martial affairs of the country with great energy. But we are now informed of another transgression of this aged monarch, which exposed him to much trouble, and brought the nation into great distress. In three days the pestilence swept off upwards of seventy thousand of the people.

1. *The cause of the judgment.* The people had sinned. The particular crimes of which they were now guilty are not specified; but "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (v. 1); and He is never

angry without a cause. It is probable that their sin was a general forgetfulness of God, and a vain confidence in the strength, numbers, and valor of the nation; for with this feeling of national vanity even David was affected. This led him to direct that a general census of the people be taken, for the purpose probably of forming an army with a view to foreign conquests (v. 2). Joab protested but obeyed (vs. 3-9). Whatever the precise nature of this transgression might have been, it is certain that Joab and the other captains fully understood the iniquitous character of the work; and although, after having expostulated with the king in vain, they proceeded with the enumeration of the people, it was never completed. The language of the inspired writer, in the narrative of the event, is remarkable. After stating the numbers returned to the king by the captain-general, it is said, "But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them; for the king's word was abominable to Joab" (1 Chron. xxi. 6) The sin involved must have been well-known at the time, and that accounts for the omission of any specific description of it.

2. *The nature of the judgment.* From verse 10 it would appear that the king was awakened to a sense of his guilt before any messenger from God came to him. His conscience is touched and his pride humbled. His sin is pardoned; but God suffers him to bear chastisement. Gad, God's messenger, brings him the terrible message. His choice is a hard one, between famine, defeat, and pestilence. The latter David chose, because it seemed to him to come most directly from the hand of the Lord. "Why is it, we are disposed to ask, that in almost all languages pestilence has been called by a name which—like our own word *plague*, which means a stroke—directly points to God's agency in its appearance? A proud philosophy, in these modern days, would say that all this was the merest superstition; inasmuch as all such things as famine and pestilence make their appearance in accordance with natural laws, and have no connection with the moral character of a community; while prayer for their removal, being a virtual request that God should interfere with the operation of these laws and work a miracle in their suspension, must ever be in vain. But there are things deeper and truer than any such philosophy, and among these I place the spiritual instincts of the human heart. If we admit that there is a personal God, and that He is in any real sense the moral governor of mankind, the conclusion is irresistible, that He regulates the occurrences of the physical universe with a view to the moral training of His human creatures. As Isaac Taylor has remarked, 'This is, in fact, the great miracle of providence, that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes.' Just as the parent seeks to benefit his child morally, by inflicting on him some physical suffering, so God in His government of the world checks the sins of men by sending upon communities the physical calamities of pestilence, famine, and the like. I do not deny, of course, that these calamities come through the ordinary operation of law; what I affirm is, that *these laws have been so adjusted by the Divine Governor of the world, that through them, and without any miraculous interference with them, He visits moral evil with physical chastisement*; and so it is not superstition, but rather the truest piety and the highest philosophy, which leads a people, under such a visitation as that of famine, to turn to Jehovah, saying, 'Show us wherefore thou contendest with us.'—Taylor.

II. THE DELIVERANCE.

Terror and destruction filled the land. But God was good. The plague had lasted but one day when He interposed.

1. *God repenting.* "The Lord repented Him of the evil." This remarkable expression is used several times in the Bible. It does not imply that God had changed, Jas. 1. Men had changed. Their repentance now made it possible for God to treat them differently. He changed his actions, not his feelings. "His compassions fail not," Sam. iii. 22. But when this compassion makes a way to manifest itself, when it flows forth full and unhindered to the sinner, we read of God repenting.

And what followed this in the heart of David? When the sun shines forth with melting warmth, the ice that has formed on the surface of the streams disappears, and again the unhindered current rushes onward to the sea (ver. 10), he had bowed in submission to the just punishment of his sin (ver. 14), but now we find his heart utterly softening, and his prayer rising up to God that he alone might bear the remainder of wrath: "Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." This was true repentance.

2. *God providing.* The "repenting" of God is no mere passing over of sin. In mercy, he cannot forget justice. If the sinner is to be restored to favor, atonement must be made for the sin. And that is just what man cannot do. The sacrifice of David's life could not have stayed the consequences of David's sin. But when the compassion of God goes forth to the sinner he says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." Job. xxxiii. 24. And so the messenger was sent to tell David by what means the plague might be averted: the place was marked out where God would accept an offering—where God would "hear and forgive:" the foreshadowing we know of that One "name . . . whereby we must be saved." Acts iv. 12. And there the king was directed to build an altar for sacrifice.

What was the response of David? Immediate obedience: "He went up as the Lord commanded." He was not content with having the appointed place and the necessary implements lent him. He must make them his own. And then, with a glad heart, he offered "burnt offerings and peace offerings" in the chosen place, and there God accepted him, and "the plague was stayed."

Thenceforward the "threshing-floor of Araunah (or Ornan), the Jebusite," became the place of sacrifice, and was marked out as the spot for the house of the Lord, for the building of which David at once began to make preparation. 1 Chron. xxii. 1, 2; etc. Many years had elapsed since David had expressed his desire to build such a house; and many of them had been years of declension, of sin, and of sorrow. But God had not forgotten Israel, or his promise to David. And in the hour of greatest darkness and peril, God's compassion came forth, God's provision made the way, and so preparation was made for that temple which was to be the outward sign to all that God dwelt in the midst of Israel, and the type of the redemption to be accomplished by Christ.

*God moving toward man first.* That is the great lesson we may learn from this history. But what should follow it? Man responding to God, as David did. When God says, "Seek ye my face," who will reply with David, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek," Ps. xxvii. 8?

Children's Corner.

LADY TEMPLE'S GRANDCHILDREN.

CHAPTER VIII.

(Continued.)

Dolly looked at him and hesitated, and by and by spoke rather timidly—

"Perhaps, Wilfred, you don't care to have them love you?"

"No, I don't. I don't care a bit about any of them."

"Then perhaps that is the reason."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, perhaps you don't try to be gentle and nice to them, so that they should grow to love you."

Wilfred laughed rather scornfully.

"They wouldn't love me whatever I did."

"What makes you say so?"

"Bruce says it's being like babies and girls to love people."

"Well, it's like brave men and grown-up women, too," answered Dolly. "Bruce might not show it like girls do, but you might make him very fond of you, I'm sure, if you would try."

"But I don't want him to be fond of me,"

"O Wilfred! why not?"

"Because I'm not fond of him."

Dolly sighed in a perplexed way.

"Aren't you fond of any of your brothers?"

"No, I don't think I am now. Hubert used to be nice when he was quite little; but now he's getting big he goes off with Edgar always, and looks down on me, because he's almost as strong now as I am, and can do lots of things I can't. Bruce and Edgar teach him a whole lot of things, and he's getting as horrid as they are themselves."