

The Sunday School

Notes and Suggestions on the International Lessons.

By Rev. Wray R. Smith.

LESSON 1.—OCTOBER 2, 1898.

Reformation Under Asa.

(Lesson Text: 2 Chron. 14: 2-12. Memory Verses: 2-5.)
(Read chaps. 14, 15, and 16.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—Help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on Thee.—2 Chron. 14: 11.

DAILY READINGS. Monday: 2 Chron. 14: 1-12. Tuesday: 2 Chron. 15: 1-9. Wednesday: 2 Chron. 15: 10-19. Thursday: Amos 5: 4-15. Friday: Psa. 20. Saturday: Isa. 31. Sunday: Prov. 3: 1-10.

The Heart of the Lesson.

Professor Baldwin Smith, a naturalist who recently made explorations in Central Australia, says that there are vast stretches of country in that land with scarcely a sign of plant, or bird, or animal life at certain seasons of the year. The sun beats down with terrific heat on miles and miles of sand and stones, the drouth sometimes continuing for months. But when the rainy season sets in, the whole scene is changed; transformed as if by magic. Clay pans and water holes become noisy in a single night with the hoarse croaking of myriads of frogs. Crustaceans hatch out with wonderful rapidity from eggs which have lain on the dry sand for weeks or months. Every inhabitant of land and water revels in the joy of living. The ground within a few days becomes green with the leaves of countless seedlings, and the once dry and silent region becomes bright with flowers and shrubbery. Birds decked out in plumage of the loveliest colors throng the air, and wild animals roam the plain.

The physical features of that dry and barren land, with its heat and drouth and lack of life and beauty, is a true picture of the moral and spiritual state of the kingdom of Judah, after the disruption under the ill-advised and selfish rule of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, who changed his father's religion as his shields from gold to brass (1 Kings 14: 27). This state of things was continued during the reign of Abijah, who followed and practiced the idolatrous rights and usages in vogue during his father's reign, on whom the dismemberment of the kingdom left him by Solomon seemed to have had little or no effect. Idolatry, anarchy, and corruption of morals left their mark upon the material condition of the nation. Every green hope withered, and real reverence for and worship of the true and living God was strangled into lifeless forms and ceremonies. Asa was the grandson of Rehoboam. His grandmother was Maachah, the idolatrous daughter of Absalom, who inherited the fierce spirit of her father. Asa was very young at the time of his father's death. His mother's wicked influence was very strong at court, but his good principle was strong enough to enable him to resist temptation. As soon as he assumed the government, he became zealous in the establishment and maintenance of true religion. Hanani and Azariah, two of the Lord's prophets, were with him to strengthen and help him in the good work of reform.

God's work is both destructive and constructive, negative and positive; each needs the other, and it is useless to put away the false unless we seek the true (vs. 3-5). Asa's first act of reform was destruc-

tive, and showed the vigor of his character. He enforced the law against his own flesh—overthrew Maachah and the abuses she upheld. He demolished the altars and high places erected for the worship of heathen gods, and idolatry was for the time exterminated.

During the Indian mutiny, Sir Henry M. Lawrence, commanding at Lucknow, and anticipating that siege that has become memorable for ever, directed the staff of engineers to spare the places deemed sacred by the Hindoos. Thus directed by this commander whom they loved and trusted, the officers spared the buildings. During the awful siege that followed, the garrison suffered greatly from the fire of the enemy stationed in those very places. Most likely Sir Henry and the brave men acting under him did what the most sagacious men would have done in the circumstances, if humane as well as clever. The result, however, was unfortunate. It is not gentleness, but sinfulness, in these times, which induces men to permit the "high places" of card-playing, dancing, intemperance, greed, selfishness, and kindred evils to exist. It was the mistake of Asa's reign that all the "high places" were not destroyed (2 Chron. 15: 17). Those at Gilgal and Beersheba, round which many solemn associations gathered and clung, were left standing. The subsequent history shows how this local worship of God degenerated into idolatry, teaching us that it is a folly, the fruit of which is evil.

Asa's work was also constructive. He called the people to renew their covenant with God and based his reliance on Jehovah. He prayed, "Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest in Thee." Prudently in time of peace he prepared for war, and in the season of prosperity he rooted his faith deep enough to be able to meet trials (vs. 4-7). The Lord was on his side and he was invincible (v. 12).

The further records, however, show that Asa's character deteriorated. In his disputes with Baasha, king of Israel, instead of relying upon God, he bribed Benhadad, of Syria, to desert the Israelitish alliance and attack the northern part of the kingdom. In his sickness "he sought not the Lord, but the physicians."⁷⁹³

Let us in closing impress our minds with this thought, that in all reforms of body or spirit, individual or national, there is but one Helper. He will bring us safely through our sufferings and conflicts; He being on our side is more than all that can be against us.

LESSON 2.—OCTOBER 9, 1898.

Jehoshaphat's Good Reign.

(Lesson Text: 2 Chron. 17: 1-16. Memory Verses: 5-6.)
(Read 1 Kings 14: 21 to 16: 34.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—"In all thy ways acknowledge Him; and He shall direct thy paths."—Prov. 3: 6.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday: 2 Chron. 17: 1-16. Tuesday: 2 Chron. 19: 1-11. Wednesday: 2 Chron. 20: 1-13. Thursday: 2 Chron. 20: 14-21. Friday: 2 Chron. 20: 22-30. Saturday: Deut. 17: 14-20. Sunday: Neh. 8: 1-12.

The Heart of the Lesson.

There was a steady ascent in character from Rehoboam through Abijah and Asa culminating in Jehoshaphat. These kings succeeded each other to the throne at Jerusalem by right of birth. They were closely related to each other by nature, but they differed widely in character and history.