

Sabbath School. BIBLE LESSONS. SECOND QUARTER.

Lesson II. April 9. Job 5: 17-27. AFFLICTIONS SANCTIFIED.

GOLDEN TEXT. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."—Heb. 12: 6.

EXPLANATORY. THE BOOK OF JOB "is admitted, with hardly a dissentient voice, to be the most sublime religious poem in the literature of the world." The author is entirely unknown. No hint anywhere is given as to who wrote the book. He is "the Great Unnamed," inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. The birthday of what has been called the most splendid flower of Hebrew poetry has been sought for up and down among the centuries, and no certain conclusion has yet been reached. It is a point on which even this omniscient age must be content to remain in doubt. The Book of Job is exceedingly difficult. Luther, in his own quaint way, says: "Job is suffering more from my version than from the taunts of his friends, and would prefer his dunghill to my translation of his lamentations." In the lessons on Job in this commentary the Revised Version will be used, on account of what Dean Bradley calls its "immeasurable superiority as compared with the older translation." More than in most books of the Bible, however needful it may be in them, it is necessary in comprehending any portion of the Book of Job to have a clear idea of the structure and purpose of the whole. It cannot be quoted verse by verse as true, as for instance what Satan says or the ill-adviced friends of Job, a part of one of whose speeches, which as a whole God Himself condemns (42: 7), though this portion may be true, being selected for our lesson to-day. The larger portion of our time to-day will be well spent if we interest our scholars in the whole noble poem, and impart to them a knowledge of the structure of the book and the style and the meaning of life. The Book of Job is the story of a soul in its conflicts with sorrow and doubt, amid the mysteries of Providence, its searchings after light and salvation, and its way into blessedness and peace.

SCENE I. Job, a wealthy Arab sheik or prince, "an ideally perfect man, not only morally blameless, but also both sincerely and scrupulously religious, a man whose virtues are piety and beyond suspicion." He was very wealthy, with great herds of cattle and a vast retinue of officers and servants. His 3,000 camels imply that he was "a princely merchant, sending out large caravans to trade in the cities of the East." He was, too, of a princely rank, visiting the sick and aiding the poor and blessing the widow and the fatherless. He had three grown into middle life. His children had grown up and settled with their families around him. Everything was religious, peaceful and prosperous. According to the teaching of Proverbs and of the Old Testament in general, we should expect his prosperity to continue, as the natural fruit of his piety, and of the blessing of God upon such a character.

SCENE II. The counsels of God. We now turn from earth to the unseen regions above. God is represented as doing in form in the spiritual world. He actually does. His messengers are gathered from all parts of the world, among them the Adversary, Satan, "a mocking, detracting, reckless, impudent being, all whose regards centre in self-gratification," and who, therefore, having no goodness himself, does not believe in goodness anywhere. All goodness has its price, is paid for, and is therefore only a form of selfishness. He that believes that there is no goodness, nor unselfish love, thereby declares that he himself has none. God points out Job as a truly good man. Satan replies, "Does Job fear God for naught?" Who would not be good if he were so well paid for it?

Note that Satan was but a representative of a large class of worldly men who excuse themselves for not being virtuous and religious by denying the reality of virtue and religion in any one. Therefore the experiment by which Satan was permitted to put Job to the test is being continually repeated, and for the same reason, that all excuses for irreligion and unbelief may be taken away, and the reality of virtue and religion made as plain as the stars on the heavens in letters of shining stars. Of these reasons for his afflictions Job was entirely ignorant. And this was necessary in order to make the test. If there had been no mystery, no unexplained thing, the whole character of the test would have been different. We note that all things are under God's control; that even Satan cannot work evil except by God's permission, given for some wise reason of His own.

SCENE III. Job in his house at Uz. All at once calamity follows calamity in rapid succession. The divine wall of protection around his home seems to be suddenly removed, and all the troubles of the world rush in and overwhelm the good man; the sheaves, an Arab tribe wandering through the whole region, but more especially from the mountainous region on the south-west. The Chaldeans from the distant north-east destroy his cattle and his camels. A cyclone from the desert, with lightning and whirlwind consume his flocks, and emit down the house where his children are holding a family feast, and every one perishes. Job bore the trial as became a saint. He bowed in submission, and worshipped God, and blessed His holy name. He could not know why these evils came upon him. Clouds and darkness surrounded the Providence of God; but he knew that there was a silver lining on the other side, and that in spite of all God is love.

SCENE IV. The counsels of heaven. Job is pointed out again as serving and loving God in very truth, and not for pay. But Satan declares that the test was not complete, accordingly he is allowed to torment Job with any physical ailment, only he must not touch his life.

SCENE V. Job is now afflicted with an awful form of leprosy, the skin on his body is falling off, and he is reduced to the rough hide of the elephant, or be-

cause it was a monstrous disease, as great among diseases as the elephant is among animals. From the skin it slowly ate its way through the tissues to the bones and sinews, and even to the marrow, rotting the whole body piecemeal. At first, though intensely itchy-some, it is not very painful, so that Job could easily speak with his friends, but it usually ends in death in the course of a few years. It was regarded as a direct stroke from God. Job had before him only a brief life, in which there was no hope, no comfort, himself a disgusting spectacle to his friends, and looked upon as an outcast from God as well as man.

DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM. The witness of Job to the reality of religion and virtue, and his own discipline and development of character, are worked out by the discussion of the great problem of Providence. How can the afflictions of wicked men, and the prosperity of the righteous of God and His supreme control?

Three friends, men of ability, chiefs and leaders like Job, came to console with Job, and offer him their wise advice. For seven days these friends sat by Job in silence. The sorrow was too great for words. The Job spoke, bitterly lamenting his fate and wishing to die. He was like Christian in Giant Despair's castle with no ray of hope. He was "Prometheus bound," unable to extricate himself from his awful fate. This was the beginning of a long debate. The theory of the friends was, that God, being good and just, must measure out suffering in proportion to sin. How else could He be just? Therefore Job must have committed some great crime. But Job knew he was innocent. At least he was not so bad as many men he knew who yet were prosperous and happy. He could not understand it. It was a mystery, without solution. Still, he insisted that he was innocent; that his calamities were not the measure of his sin. This appeared to his friends to be almost blasphemy. It was charging God with injustice. The verses selected for to-day's lesson are a part of Eliphaz's speech in answer to Job. Note especially his reproach of Job by his vision in 4: 13-19.

17. Behold, happy. Blessed, peculiarly favored. It is more blessed to be good with afflictions than to be bad with all earthly riches and pleasures. Therefore desist now. Do not feel so bitterly, and wish to escape death.

18. For he maketh sore. As a chastisement for the good of his people. And bindeth up. As soon as the chastisement has done its work. In the Hebrews (12: 6-11) we have the same truth set forth more clearly still. The difficulty with Job was that he could not see what he had done that he should be so severely chastised.

19. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven. A general indefinite number as we say, "three or four." Eliphaz then proceeds to enumerate the chief dangers which would be likely to assail one in Job's circumstances.

(1) 20. Famine. (2) 21. War. (3) 21. The scourge of the tongue. Slander and gossip, which is named "Whispering," is more dangerous than the sword; whose tongue outcries all the worms of Nile. Job felt the scourge of his friends' tongues before he was through with them. (4) 21. Sudden danger from pestilence, disease, or want, destruction of death. (5) The power of nature shall not harm, but help him. (6) 22. The beasts. Wild beasts from whom there was danger to himself and to his flocks and herds in these regions. The same promise is made in Ps. 91: 13. (7) 23. There shall be no league with the stones of the field. So that they will not injure him, nor be found straying over his tilled land. (8) 25. He shall be safe from robbers. (9) 25. Danger to his family shall be removed. They need (thy children) shall be great in number. As the grass of the earth. Fresh, happy, flourishing, abundant. (10) 26. Come to thy grave in a full age. When he was ripe for heaven, after having accomplished his work here. (11) 27. Lo this, we have searched it. He had thoroughly investigated the subject, and this was the result of his investigations.

Summer and Lincoln. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that their two minds were scarcely intended to agree. Mr. Sumner took pleasure in mentioning that he had studied the Summa of St. Thomas. I do not know if it was from that source that he derived his reasoning methods; it is true, however, that in many respects his mind had been accustomed to the argumentative process of the Scholastics. Mr. Sumner reasoned as a reasoner, a professor of theology. From the days of his youth he had felt that he had a calling in life; that he would devote his existence to opposing injustice everywhere.

In contrast to this character so marked, this nature so vigorous, to this scholar so formed by the most profound studies, stood Mr. Lincoln, the man of the people, of the humblest origin, moulded for State affairs by the practice of affairs themselves, having risen little by little, through fatigue and toil, knowing from experience all the difficulties of life, whose disposition was sweet and more than persistent and audacious. He, too, had devoted himself to the triumph of his ideas of justice and emancipation, but he was accustomed to measure obstacles, and to appreciate them. Gifted, furthermore, with an uncommon reasoning power, he felt himself sufficiently strong to oppose by the sole force of his obstinacy all efforts made in a way to alter his opinions.—Scribner's Magazine.

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B. Y. P. U. Little Corners.

Georgia Willis, who helped in the kitchen, was rubbing the knives. Some one had been careless and let one get rusty, but Georgia rubbed with all her might; rubbed and sang softly a little song:—"In the world is darkness, you in your little corner, and I in mine."

"What do you rub at them knives for?" Mary said. Mary was the cook. "Because they are in my corner," said Georgia, brightly. "You in your little corner, you know, and I in mine. I'll do the best I can, that's all I can do." "I wouldn't waste my strength," said Mary. "I know that no one will notice."

"Jesus will," said Georgia, and then she sang again, "You in your little corner, and I in mine. I suppose," said Mary to herself, "if that child must do what she can, I suppose I must. If he knows about knives, it's likely he does about steak," and she smiled brightly.

"Mary, the steak was very nicely done to-day," Miss Emma said. "That's all along of Georgia," said Mary, with a pleased red face, and then she told about the steak. "Miss Emma was ironing ruffles; she was tired and warm. 'Helen will not care whether they are fluted nicely or not,' she said; 'I'll hurry them over'; but after she heard about the knives she did her best."

"How beautiful my dress is done up," Helen said, and Emma, laughing, answered: "That is owing to Georgia"; then she told about the knives. "You corner! what do you mean?" "Then Helen told about the knives. 'Well,' said the friend, 'if you will not go with me, perhaps I will with you,' and they went to the prayer meeting."

"You helped ever so much with the singing this evening. That was what your pastor said to me as they were going home. 'It was afraid you wouldn't be there.'"

"It was owing to our Georgia," said Helen; she seemed to think that she must do what she could, if it were only knives. Then she told him the story. "I believe I will go in here again," said the minister, stopping before a poor little house. "I said yesterday there was no use, but I must do what I can." In the house a sick man was lying; again and again the minister had called, but he wouldn't listen to him; but tonight he said, "I have come to tell you a story." Then he told him about Georgia Willis, about her knives, and he little corner, and "doing what she could," and the sick man wiped the tears from his eyes and said, "I'll find my corner, too; I'll try to shine for Him." And the sick man was Georgia's Providence.

"I believe I won't go to walk," said Helen, hesitatingly. "I'll finish that list of mothers; suppose I can if I think of it." "Why, child, are you here sewing?" her mother said; "I thought you had gone to walk."

"No, ma'am; this dress seemed to be in my corner; so I thought I would finish it." "In your corner?" her mother repeated, in surprise; and then Helen told about the knives.

The door-bell rang, and the mother went thoughtfully to receive her pastor. "I suppose I could give more," she said to herself, as she slowly took out the ten dollars that she had laid aside for missions. "If that poor child in the kitchen is trying to do what she can, I wonder if I am. I'll make it twenty-five."

And Georgia's guardian angel said to another angel, "Georgia Willis gave twenty-five dollars to our dear people in India, to-day."

"Twenty-five dollars?" said the other angel. "Why, I thought she was poor." "Oh, well, she thinks she is, but her Father in heaven isn't, you know. She did what she could and He did the rest." But Georgia knew nothing about all this and the next morning she brightened her knives and sang cheerily:

"In the world is darkness, you in your little corner, and I in mine." —Parry.

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