

SUPPLEMENTARY LESSON NOTES.

A.D. 28.] LESSON I. [Oct. 2.

THE CENTURION'S FAITH.

Matt. 8. 5-13. Gold. Text, Matt. 8. 10.

WE are now about to deal with one of the most interesting events that occurred to our Lord in the vicinity of Capernaum. He had just made a fatiguing tour, and was about to halt for a rest, when a deputation of the elders of the Jews (Luke vii. 1-9) waited on him. They were the foremost men in Capernaum—the governing body of the synagogue, and, as such, the Jewish magistrates of the town. It is the habit in the east to send such embassies when any request is to be made or invitation given with circumstances of special respect; but there was a feature in this case that made it very unusual. The members of the deputation, though ecclesiastical officers, came as the representatives of a heathen, possibly of a Samaritan. Capernaum lying on the edge of his territory, Herod Antipas kept a small garrison there, and this, at that time, was under the command of a centurion who, like many of the better heathen of the day, had been drawn towards Judaism by its favourable contrast with idolatry. He had shown his sympathy with the nation, and his generous spirit, in a way then not uncommon among the wealthy, by building a synagogue in the town—perhaps that of which the massive ruins still remain. In order to get the full details of this event, it will be well for the student to study the account given in Luke vii. in connection with that of Matthew. Such study will afford an excellent lesson in biblical interpretation. It will show that the Evangelists give only the essential facts—those that are necessary to an understanding of the moral significance of the miracle and of the teaching of our Lord.

It makes a great deal of difference as to who it is that enters a town. Three days before writing this, a negro minstrel, dressed in red like a clown, and a travelling temperance lecturer, appeared on the streets almost at the same hour. One came to attract the ear and amuse the giddy; the other to warn the degraded and comfort the broken-hearted. When Jesus entered Capernaum, he endeared himself to the people by healing their sick and relieving their wants. His looks were so inviting, and his heart so large and compassionate, that people overlooked the rules of society and the ban of religion, and crowded in upon him. This centurion was what we call a pagan, and yet he felt that he could not do without Jesus. He scarcely knew what was right for him to do in approaching Jesus, and yet, somehow, he had an instinct that all would be right if he came. He did not wish to come into collision with the established usages of the place—he was but a blunt soldier at the best—but he seemed to

realize that there was something in the world to do besides soldiering under Cesar. Cesar was as liable to sink when swimming the Hellespont as anyone else. He had to call on Cassius once to carry him on his back to the shore. What, then, would the Cæsars do in the presence of disease and death? And when they went down to their graves, in what sense would they be any better than the balance of the dead?

This centurion is to be commended for his faith. The Roman nation, to which he belonged, had a rooted prejudice against this Nazarene. Its very best critics looked upon Christianity as a terrible, deluding superstition. All their historians speak of it. Then they had a rich and dominant religion of their own, embellished by statuary and entrenched in ancient temples. It required courage to pass all this by, and come to a penniless wanderer like Jesus. But this soldier was a practical man. He measured religions by what they did. He had heard that Jesus was not only a capable teacher but also a wondrous healer—that he did not despise the bodies of men in his eagerness to reach their souls; but, rather, that he reached their souls through their bodies. Those who came to him in faith went away rejoicing. He went about everywhere doing good. This looked to be about the right thing to this soldier, and so he ventured to approach him. Jesus, who reads men's hearts, took pleasure in his earnestness and confidence, and, as the soldier desired, bestowed upon him the blessing.

A.D. 28.] LESSON II. [Oct. 9.

THE TEMPEST STILLED.

Matt. 8. 18-27. Gold. Text, Matt. 8. 26.

CAPERNAUM could not contain Jesus and his disciples for any long period. It was necessary that they should occupy a wider sphere of life and work than this city and the little districts around it afforded. It was time these disciples were preparing for independent action. Their character and power of self-reliance must be formed and strengthened by putting them to the proof. There were weaknesses to be revealed and to be overcome. Then, also, Jesus had involved himself with the critics and priests once more by pursuing his unparalleled course, and he wished to retire from their abuse. The wall of lonely hills on the east side of the sea, seamed by deep gorges, through which the path led to the vast upland plains of the eastern Jordan—a region little known to the busy population of Galilee, and in bad reputation with most as more heathen than Jewish—just seemed to suit, offering him a secure retreat. Instead of returning to Peter's house, therefore, where he had healed his wife's mother, he ordered his disciples to carry him to the opposite shore. His enemies would not be likely to seek a Rabbi like him in such an unclean district—in the heathen city of Gadara.