

The Sabbath School. INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

THE CENTURION'S FAITH.

August 11th.] A. D. 31. [Luke 7: 1-10.]

GOLDEN TEXT:—According to your faith be it unto you.—Matt. 9: 29.

The same miracle is recorded in Matt. 8: 5-13. Though in some respects similar, that in John 4: 46-52 is not the same.

The sermon on the mount is ended, and the Lord returns to the Capernaum, where so many mighty works were wrought. Here he heals by His word the servant of a Roman centurion. The servant was "ready to die;" Matthew says, "sick of the palsy;" "grievously tormented." "The disease may have been tetanus, which the ancient physicians included under paralysis." The centurion loved his servant, and had faith to approach the Great Healer on his behalf. We learn not whether he was a proselyte; but he favoured the Jewish religion, and stood well with the people. The Jewish "Elders" or "Presbyters" were very willing to serve one who "loved their nation and built them a synagogue," and went to Jesus in the name of him whose deep humility forbade his going in person. They plead his case with the earnestness of grateful affection. (We should suppose from Matthew that the centurion went himself. But there is no contradiction; "for he who does a thing by another does it himself.") The Lord, probably to mark His approval of the centurion's faith, proceeds to his house; but the miracle is wrought before he comes to it; v. 10 1; so in Jer. 4: 50-52. As Jesus is coming, a second deputation is sent, this time "friends;" "a very delicate and thoroughly natural touch." Their words attest a deep humility and strong faith of the Roman soldier. He felt himself unworthy to go to Christ, much more to have the Lord enter his house and contract perhaps ceremonial defilement. He was only a heathen: out of God's fold: a sinner too in the truest sense. Besides his confidence in the Lord's power assured him that he needed not to come under his roof in order to heal his servant. His own experience, illuminated by his faith, supplies the illustration. He, "a man set under authority"—a subordinate officer—was obeyed immediately when he merely gave the word to his soldiers and servants: how much more surely would all agencies—would *discrete*—obey Him who was truly Lord! His faith assures him that a "word" only of this Master was needed.

When the message is delivered, the Lord "marvelled at him," which must not be explained away as inconsistent with His divinity. "The mysteries of the Lord's humanity are too precious to be thus sacrificed." Once besides (only) we read of Christ *marvelling*, viz. at the unbelief of Nazareth (Mark 6: 6). The Lord bears witness, that faith equal to that of this Gentile He had not found even among the covenant people. A most interesting addition to Luke's account is given in Matt. 8: 11-12: which is found in Luke in another connection; chap. 13: 28-29. God's sovereign grace should be seen in classing Gentiles with Jews; nay, in giving them the place left vacant by Jewish unbelief.

The returning messengers find the servant not in process of recovery, but entirely well. "Virtue has gone forth" from Christ.

This pious centurion is to be classed with that other centurion (Acts 10) in whose case Peter first completely opened the door of the Christian Church to the Gentiles. The simplicity of the faith of pious soldiers has often been remarked on. The Lord seems to use their habits of obedience in developing this grace.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

August 18th.] A. D. 31.] [Luke 7: 11-17.]

GOLDEN TEXT:—And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.—v. 13.

This miracle is recorded by Luke only. It is one of three instances in which we read that Christ raised the dead. "He raised one, Jairus daughter, when just dead; one (as here) on the way to burial; one (Lazarus) who had been buried four days;" see Matt. 9: 18, Mark 5: 22, John 11. He who will finally raise all the dead, (John 5: 28) has already shown His absolute power over death.

Nain was a small town in the tribe of Issachar, a few miles South of Mount Tabor, on the road to Jerusalem, on the northern slope of little Hermon. Not by accident the Lord approached the gate of Nain, when the only son of a widowed mother was being carried forth, for the Jews interred outside their towns for burial. The sympathetic sorrow of the Lord was testified by the "much people" who were with her to whom bereavement proverbially bitter had come (Jer. 6: 26, Zech. 12: 10, Amos 8: 10.) The compassionate Saviour will first allay her grief: "weep not." The word is not vain, but is followed by a mighty act, (see Rev. 21: 4.) As at Lazarus grave, the conqueror of death knows what He will do. "He came and touched the bier," or open coffin; there being, doubtless, something in His manner which caused the bearers "to stand still." In raising Lazarus He stands before the grave; here He touches the coffin; Jairus' daughter He took by the hand. In His own name—not looking for higher aid as prophets did when they raised the dead (1 Kings 17: 21, 2 Kings 4: 33.)—He says "young man arise." Immediately life and health return. "Christ arouses from the bier as easily as another would arouse from the bed."

The raised youth is "delivered to his mother." now to be hers, we may hope, in a truer sense than before: for little doubt there is a deeper reason for the miracle than the mere consoling of the widow, though this is not a trifle to the compassionate Lord.

The effect of this miracle is that "a fear came on all." The hand of omnipotence was seen, and men cannot have God come near without awe. Even the holiest and loftiest veil their faces before Him. Those conscious of guilt are filled with alarm, chap. 1: 65. But the people also "glorify God" whose power was revealed, declaring that "a great prophet is risen," and that God hath visited His people, (chap. 1: 68.) None, but the greatest prophets have raised the dead. Though the multitude might not know that this was "the Prophet" (Deut. 18: 15) they will at least class Him with Elijah and Elisha. Though hundreds of years had elapsed since the death of Malachi, the last of the old prophets, God had visited His people again in sending this messenger from His self.

The "rumour of Him" i.e., the report not merely of what the people said of Him, but the report of the miracle wrought pervaded all Judaea,—to which he was on his way,—and all the region round about the city of Nain. Thus whilst he did not "cause His voice to be heard in the streets," men were everywhere prepared for His coming and eager to hear Him.