

tion or station of life. It is of such a nature in its very first requirement that none can say, "I have nothing to do for the Lord."

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON. November 27th.

LESSON IX.

THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS. Num. xxi. 1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT.—And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.—John iii. 14, 15.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—Types and symbols point to Christ.

LESSON EXPLANATIONS.

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We do not need to dwell on the introductory verses 1-3, except so far as is needful to the understanding of the circumstance in which this historic occurrence took place. The opening words are to be read in such a way as to make Arad not the name of a king but of the capital. See in confirmation Judges i. 16, where Arad is a place. The change is slight, and the meaning unaltered. "The Canaanite king of Arad," which was a royal city, named with Libnah and Hormah in Josh. xii. 14. The ancients—Eusebius, for example—placed it twenty miles from Hebron; and this agrees with Robinson's view. He found a hill, *Tell Arad*, eight hours from Hebron, which he conjectured to be the site of the place. So it is described generally as "in the south" (v. 1).

"The way of the spies"—taken thirty-eight years before—is described in Num. xiii. 21, and, as it includes the south and Hebron, it entirely harmonizes with the view given above. (See map.) This resistance to Israel by the king of Arad must have been very vigorous; it is mentioned again in Num. xxxiii. 40. His attack, favoured no doubt by his knowledge of the place, and perhaps the want of preparation of Israel, was so far successful that "he took some of them prisoners." So men, secure and at their ease, often suffer in the first instance; the temporary failure rouses them, puts them in the right temper, and drives them to the source of all strength.

V. 2 seems to show that this was the experience of the people; and it may indeed be on this account that the disaster is reported. The temptation to a compromise with the Canaanites was strong. The people here realized that such was not God's will for them; that He meant the rooting out of the people and the ruin of their cities. Israel was to be a new people to Him, with the national life built up afresh from the foundations.

So, after the example of the patriarch Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 20), the people vowed, accepting God's plan, promising to carry it out. As in Jacob's case, the vow does not dictate conditions to God, but receives His revealed will. ("Seeing that God will be with me," v. 15, the "if" is as in Phil. ii. 1, and probably Col. iii. 1.)

V. 3 states in general terms that God heard and answered the implied prayer. The enemy was defeated, their cities were destroyed, and the name Hormah ("utter destruction," see margin) given to the place. It is used in Num. xiv. 45 by way of anticipation. If that passage describes the defeat here mentioned, then the name acquires a special fitness. It is literally the place of banning, where Israel put the Canaanites under "ban" or vow of destruction. (See Lev. xxvii. 28, 29.) The whole of this passage, vs. 1-3, seems to be a summary of past events, mentioned here to show the perverseness of murmuring against one who was so faithful. The order of *time* is not closely

followed; but, as in the Gospels, parts are chosen for report that lie in the line of the writer's *object*. Israel did not at this time occupy this region. It was re-occupied by the Canaanites apparently, and reconquered in the time of Joshua (Josh. xv. 30).

V. 4 tells us that as Edom, keeping up the old feud, refused a way through his lands (Num. xx. 14-21), the people journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea; in fact, had to go round, as detailed in Judges xi. 18. Great discouragement was the result. Through rocky defiles they had for some days to traverse the Arabah, a high plain of sand, gravel, and little vegetation, occasionally visited with sand storms. It was very disheartening; but God had so led them that there was no excuse for the course described in v. 5. For the eighth time they mutinied against God and Moses. They dislike the way. Then, in a fault-finding mood, the food displeases them; the water is not satisfactory. So men, in a fault-finding or discouraged temper, quarrel with the gospel and the other means of grace. "This supernatural food is too light, the bread-crum of our human reason and profound discourse would better content us." They repeat the old cry, just as infidelity in each generation does the old objections. (See Ex. xvi. 3 and xvii. 3.) It is not republics only, it is the race that is ungrateful. Men must learn to be public spirited and brave for other reasons than the approbation and gratitude of their kind. See on the "light bread" Num. xi. 6. The chains and hard bondage of Egypt are forgotten; only the flesh pots are remembered.

V. 6 shows how, though Moses did nothing to vindicate himself, God showed His displeasure. Their stinging reproaches are resented, for "they had carried themselves like serpents to their governors. How often had they stung Moses and Aaron near to death" by their discontent and slanders! Venomous accusers now punish them.

It is God's way to take the natural and on it build up the supernatural. (See manna, "five loaves," etc.) There are poisonous vipers in the Arabah, of large size, mottled with fiery red spots, whose bite produces thirst, inflammation, fever, etc., described by Burkhart and Shubert. Hence they are called "fiery." So it was of old. Alexander the Great lost many soldiers in a similar region from snake-bites, according to Strabo, who mentions the peninsula of Sinai as thus infested. God's justice had but to extend a scourge already existing. How far the loss of life went we are not told, but now they have their heart's wish, "Would God we were dead in the wilderness!" The imprecations of unbelief are heard.

V. 7 shows us the people, convinced of their sin, humbled, penitent. They come properly to Moses, whom they had wronged, and own their fault, asking his intercession, as they had done before. So men need affliction to open their eyes, show them the reality of things, and bring them to sue for help where they have questioned or censured. Moses complied.

V. 8 reports the answer. It magnifies Moses; it keeps their sin and folly before their mind; it recalls dependence on God. The symbol of deliverance—resembles the means of their suffering. It is like a serpent, as Christ, the second Adam, is like the first; but it is harmless, as Christ is, and looking to it brings healing, as Christ, looked to by us, brings life. Christ has explained the symbol (John iii. 14, 15). No one could look at the brazen serpent without remembering the sin and the form of suffering consequent; and so with Christ. Penitence goes with true faith.

V. 9. Moses did as directed. There were many destroying; there was one healing serpent. There are many tempt-

ers; there is but one Saviour. There are many roads to ruin; there is but one "way of life." It was only for the bitten to "look and live." (See the text, Isa. xlv. 22.)

We cannot pass from this without noticing the way in which man is inclined to abuse divinely-given symbols. The brazen serpent was a most interesting and in the time of Hezekiah a venerable relic. It was a divine appointment. So the people had taken to burning incense to it. So the "crucifix" and the elements in the Lord's Supper receive a special kind of homage by Christian image-worshippers. With the true spirit of a reformer, for which no doubt there were some to count him a barbarian and what not, Hezekiah broke it in pieces, and called it a "bit of brass," *Nehushtan* (2 Kings xviii. 4). It had served the end for which it was appointed. To turn it to other and forbidden ends was idolatry, no matter how much "reverence for antiquity," "sacredness," etc., could be urged in its favour. This is a lesson which much of Christendom has to learn. "God," says Bishop Hare, "commanded the raising of it; God approved the demolishing of it. Superstitious use can mar the very institutions of God; how much more the most wise and well-grounded devices of men!"

The points to be emphasized are such as the following:

1. We may look for some success in our ways when honestly trying to carry out the revealed will of God (vs. 1-3). "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways." Boys going into business should inquire if it is such as they can expect God to bless.

2. Injuries from the hand of our fellowmen, or their consequences, give no reason for our quarrelling with our true friends (as Moses was to Israel) or with God. One sometimes hears men rail against the church for some sin of omission or commission against them. If Edom was churlish was that any reason to murmur against Moses and God?

3. It is dangerous work to censure God's ways with us, and make light of the provisions He gives us. Discontentment, complaint, and angry censoriousness grieve His Spirit, and if not repented of, bring penalty here or hereafter.

4. But He is "ready to forgive." His grace is rich. He meets the suppliant, and brings relief. So here. So with salvation that is in Christ Jesus. (See Heb. vii. 26; 2 Cor. v. 21, and Gal. iii. 13.)

5. He has a sovereign right to chose the way of saving us. A hundred ways could have been devised by any ingenious Hebrew. God took His, and no doubt every bitten Hebrew was glad of it. They who did not feel the fever could criticize.

6. The serpent of brass, like the sacraments, had no virtue in itself, nor in Moses, who set it up, but in the appointment of the Lord and the faith of the people.

7. That a serpent of brass should cure them looked very unlikely. But it did. The way of life is foolishness to the wisdom of this world.

COMMONPLACE LIVES.

A good many people spend all their life hunting for the place in this world which they were intended to fill. They never settle down to anything with any sort of restful or contented feeling. What they are doing now is not by any means the work that is suited to their abilities. They have a sunny ideal of a very noble life which they would like to reach, in which their powers would find free scope, and where they could make a very bright record. But in their present position they cannot do much of anything, and there is little use to try. Their life is a humdrum and prosy routine, and they can accomplish nothing really worthy and beautiful. So they go on discontented

with their own lot, and sighing for another, and while they sigh the years glide away, and soon they will come to the end to find that they have missed every opportunity of doing anything worthy of an immortal being in the passage to eternity. The truth is, one's vocation is never some far-off possibility. It is always the simple round of duties that the passing hour brings. Some one has pictured the days as coming to us with their faces veiled, bearing only the commonest gifts in their hands; but when they have passed beyond our recall the draped figures become radiant, and the gifts we rejected are treasures fit for king's houses. No day is commonplace if we only had eyes to see its splendour. There is no duty that comes to our hand but brings to us the possibility of kingly service.—*S. S. Times*.

"A commonplace life," we say, and we sigh,
But why should we sigh as we say?
The commonplace sun in the commonplace sky
Makes up the commonplace day;
The moon and the stars are commonplace things,
And the flower that blooms, and the bird that sings:
But dark were the world and sad our lot
If the flowers failed and the sun shone not;
And God, who studies each separate soul,
Out of commonplace lives makes His beautiful whole."

HOW FREDERICK DOUGLASS GOT HIS NAME.

In the first number of *The Century Magazine* (November), Frederick Douglass tells for the first time the manner of his escape from slavery. The account takes him to New Bedford, where he first obtained steady work and where he got his name, as follows:

Once initiated into my new life of freedom, and assured by Mr. Johnson that I need not fear recapture in that city, a comparatively unimportant question arose as to the name by which I should be known thereafter in my new relation as a free man. The name given me by my dear mother was no less pretentious and long than Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. I had, however, while living in Maryland, dispensed with the Augustus Washington, and retained only Frederick Bailey. Between Baltimore and New Bedford, the better to conceal myself from the slave-hunters, I had parted with Bailey and called myself Johnson; but in New Bedford I found that the Johnson family was already so numerous as to cause some confusion in distinguishing them, hence a change in this name seemed desirable. Nathan Johnson, mine host, placed great emphasis upon this necessity, and wished me to allow him to select a name for me. I consented, and he called me by my present name—the one by which I have been known for three and forty years—Frederick Douglass. Mr. Johnson had just been reading "The Lady of the Lake," and so pleased was he with its great character that he wished me to bear his name. Since reading that charming poem myself, I have often thought that, considering the noble hospitality and manly character of Nathan Johnson—black man though he was—he, far more than I, illustrated the virtues of the Douglas of Scotland. Sure am I that, if any slave-catcher had entered his domicile with a view to my recapture, Johnson would have shown himself like him of the "stalwart hand."

DARE to be true; nothing can need a lie.—*George Herbert*.

HEAVEN never helps the man that will not act.—*Sophocles*.

WHAT men call accident is the doing of God's providence.—*Bailey*.

ADVERSITY borrows its sharpest sting from impatience.—*Bishop Horne*.

ALL men's souls are immortal, but the souls of the righteous are both immortal and divine.—*Socrates*.