

God of love that we have in this Lesson. From ch. 11 (see For Teachers of Bible Classes) get a picture of prodigal Israel, that God's love may shine brightly on that dark background.

1. *The prophet enjoins repentance upon Israel*, vs. 1-3. (1) The prophet pleads with the people to return to God, v. 1. Bring out the wooing note in these words. This was a main characteristic in the preaching of Phillips Brooks. It reflects the loving attitude of God towards sinners and His eager desire to save them. (2) He tells them how to return, what to say when they return. Dwell on the words he puts into the mouth of Israel, words of humble confession,—“Take away all iniquity”; words of earnest entreaty,—“Receive us graciously”; words of covenant engagement,—“So will we render the calves of our lips”; words of grateful loving trust (see v. 3). It is easy to get away from God; it is not so easy to return. We need some one to tell us what to do, what to say.

2. *God's promise of pardon*, vs. 4-9. (1) What exceeding great and precious promises (see v. 4)! Dwell upon these promises. They are full of meaning for us as well as for the Israelites. We need healing; we long for love, to realize that God loves us. It was when Edward Irving, out of his own great heart of love, said to the sick boy, “God loves you”, that the lad grasped something of the meaning of these words and found rest. It was when the troubled soul of Geordie Howe, in, *The Bonnie Brier Bush*, realized that God loved him, that he cuddled down into his bed and fell asleep in God's love, as in his mother's arms. (2) Where can we find such a grouping of beautiful nature illustrations as we have here? (Vs. 5-8.) What nature emblem represents what God is to us? (V. 5.) What does this mean? What nature emblems picture a life that is lived in union and communion with God? Everything strong and beautiful and useful in nature is laid under contribution to make this picture complete, to reveal to us what God can make out of these poor weak and wayward lives of ours.

The application is in the last verse,—the one who is wise will lay the thoughts of this Les-

son to heart, and live up more and more into the life and love of God.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

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Help the scholars to see the background of the Lesson. In ch. 13, Hosea has predicted the destruction of Samaria, the capital of Israel. Emphasize the teaching that it was for their sins that the people of Israel were thus to be punished. But threatening is not the prophet's last word; he has a word of invitation and promise. This word is contained in the Lesson. Use the following outline to direct the conversation:

I. *ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE*, vs. 1-3. Bring out what true repentance means. It is to “return” to God, that is, to forsake sin and truly love and serve God. And that is what Israel needs; for it is by their “iniquity” they have fallen. Repentance will lift them up again. Repentance, again, is to “take . . . words” that come from the heart, words expressing sorrow for sin and resolve for a better life. It is frankly and humbly to acknowledge “iniquity” and to ask God to “receive us graciously”, of His own free love, and not because of any merit in the asker. It is to offer to God, not formal sacrifices, but the praises that well up in the heart and must find utterance by the lips. It is to cease putting confidence in human helpers and false gods, and to trust only in the living God.

II. *GOD'S FORGIVENESS*, vs. 4-6. Emphasize God's eager willingness to forgive. Three times He says, “I will”, “I will”, “I will”. Get the scholars to see how much is included in the divine forgiveness. There is healing for “backsliding”, forsaking of the Lord here pictured as a disease. There is free love, as abounding as it is undeserved. There is the turning away of the “anger” which sin so richly deserves. There are blessings that come as constantly as the gently falling dew which nightly refreshes the grass. And the result will be that those forgiven will grow in beauty like the lily, in strength like the everlasting mountains, in unfailing vigor and freshness like the olive, and in fragrance like the cedar.

III. *GOD'S CARE*, vs. 7-9. Bring out all