

"hated thoughts"; and I thought of myself and wondered if I were as sensitive as this little kitchen-maid to bad thoughts, and remembered how subtle and distressing evil thoughts are to a heart that really desires to be pure and holy, as this child evidently did. And then I wondered what her bad thoughts could be, and determined to comfort and reassure her a little, and so said:—

"Bad thoughts are sinful; but if you do not encourage them, and turn away from them, and ask the Lord who saved you to take them away from you and put his own thoughts into your heart, He will do it. You must not suppose because some old bad thoughts come into your head that you are not, therefore, a child of God. Besides, when we are first saved or forgiven all our sins are not taken out of us. Jesus first takes us and makes us His own children, and then He begins to take away all the old evil. Just as if some kind, rich lady should make you her child; then she would take off your old clothes and put on new ones, and teach you all sorts of nice ways, and send you to school so that you might be fitted to be her child. Now, you see all this could not be done in a minute; but you would be her child all the time that you were getting rid of your old ways and learning all the new ways which your new mother would be pleased to have you learn. Do you not see that God has to teach you, now that He has got you, and you should not get discouraged just because in one week you have not learned everything that a Christian should learn, and got free from every evil thought and old habit. This is a part of God's goodness to us—that He gives us grace to overcome the evil. He is with us all the time, just as a loving teacher would be, to point out our mistakes and show us how to overcome them and do our lessons rightly. He is satisfied when he knows that we have a desire to be good children. But you said you had gone back to your old ways. Now what are these old ways which have given you so much distress?"

At this the little maid hung her head again, and looked very shamefaced. For a long while she would not speak. I wondered what her besetments were, which had overcome her. I was expecting to hear a confession of some one of the hundred vices and evil ways into which all sorts of people (mistresses, as well as maids) fall. For while we do not hold a "confessional" in the inquiry-room, many a strange confession is made of sins and habits which have long burdened the soul and stood between it and its peace.

Not getting an answer, I said, with some urgency, yet with kindness:

"Come, my child, tell me what your old ways are, which so distress you; perhaps, if you will tell me, I can help you, or at least tell you how you can get rid of them."

After some minutes of hesitation, with her head bent still lower, as if to hide her shame, she said:

"I gets sulky when I'm spoke to."

(To be continued.)

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

Oct. 19th, } **SOLOMON'S CHOICE.** } Kings 3:
1884. } 5-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom."—Prov. 4:7.

TIME.—B. C. 1015.

PLACE.—Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin, a few miles north of Jerusalem.

PARALLEL.—1 Chron. 1:1-15.

INTRODUCTION.—David was dead; for six months Solomon ruled in conjunction with his father, but at the end of that period "the days of David drew nigh that he should die," he thereupon delivered his last charge, his final personal wishes, to Solomon. It had reference chiefly to individuals whom he would have Solomon punish or reward, as Joab and Shimei on the one hand, and the son of Barzillai on the other, and "so David slept with his fathers," and "then sat Solomon on the throne of David." The preceding chapter deals with the King's actions towards the men respecting whom his father had charged him. We need not suppose from the fact of their being recorded together that the death of these men took place in close succession, the contrary is probably the fact, but the narrator would show how the instructions of David were fulfilled, and so groups the incidents together. One of the first acts of Solomon, was to marry an Egyptian Princess, he "made affinity with Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and married his daughter," an incident which shows how high, politically, the Hebrew nation had become under the rule of David when it could make an alliance, on equal terms, with such an ancient and proud monarchy as that of Egypt. Solomon, we are told, "loved the Lord," only he sacrificed in high places; "a practice against the express command of God, but the practice had all along been tolerated, from necessity or the force of ancient custom. Gideon and Manoah had both built altars on such spots, Samuel had repeatedly done so, while in lesson eight of last quarter we find David offering sacrifices at the threshing floor of Araunah, on the top of Mount Moriah. Gibeon, the scene of our lesson, was the great high place of the time, more sacred than any other from the fact that there was "the tabernacle of the congregation," and so to Gibeon Solomon went, in great state, as we find from the parallel account, to take the lead in this

season of national consecration to God. From the vast number of sacrifices the observance must have lasted several days, and it was probably at the close of the services when the mind of the King had been greatly lifted up to Divine things that the vision took place.

Notes and Comments.—Ver. 5: "the Lord appeared in a dream," as he often has been known his will, so to Abimelech, Gen. 20:3; to Jacob, 31:11; to Laban, 31:24; to Daniel, Dan. 7:1; to Joseph, Matt. 2:12, 22. We are not to suppose, as some would tell us, that Solomon felt an intense desire and had offered a fervent petition for the gift of wisdom, and so "his dream was but an imaginary repetition of his former desire." No! He who speaketh to men in a dream, "in a vision of the night," spake in that method to Solomon, "Ask," Solomon loved the Lord, ver. 8, and this is God's approval.

Ver. 6. This verse recounts God's mercies to David, all that his father had and was received from God, the greatest manifestation of kindness being that he, Solomon, his son, was sitting "on his throne."

Vers. 7, 8. There is wonderful humility and true wisdom in the utterances of these two verses; how few young men of Solomon's age, and in Solomon's position, would have felt the need that he did. We are reminded of that touching incident, when the young girl about the same age as Solomon, was told that she was Queen over the greatest Empire in the world; she could only say, with deep emotion and eyes streaming with tears, to the Archbishop, who was the messenger, "pray for me," and the after life and reign of Victoria would show that, as with Solomon, the prayer was heard and that wisdom and understanding were given her for the arduous and responsible duties to which she was called. "I am but a little child," inexperienced. Rawlinson says: "for a youth of nineteen or twenty, known to be of a pacific disposition, 1 Chron. 32:9, to have to rule over the warlike and turbulent Hebrew nation, with a strong party opposed to him and brothers of full age ready to lead it, was evidently a most difficult task." "Go out or come in," perform the whole duties of his position, so, Num. 27:17; Deut. 31:2; "in the midst of thy people," called to rule over them "which thou hast chosen," Israel being God's peculiar people the responsibilities of government were very great; "that cannot be numbered;" possibly, as has been suggested, a reference to the promise made to Abraham, but more likely one of the common hyperbolic expressions common to all languages, but especially to the east. Solomon now presents his petition. It is for "an understanding heart;" the capability of exercising a judgment that was not drawn from mere outside impressions, but from the principles which lie hidden in the human heart; "that I may discern;" it was wisdom for his office that Solomon asked, to know the right from wrong, to see the truth even through the falsehoods with which it would often be covered. An illustration of this is given in the latter part of this chapter, a wise, far-seeing judgment.

Ver. 10. "The speech pleased the Lord," as prayer always does when it is for the best gifts, and in accord with his will.

Vers. 11, 12. Now we have God's reply, "hast not asked long life;" what most men long for; "riches;" the almost universal passion; "enemies;" of whom he had some, and powerful ones too; "all his days;" nothing, in fact had he asked simply for himself; "understanding to discern judgment;" that is to judge righteously. "I have given thee;" that for which thou asked, "a wise and understanding heart." Solomon's wisdom was largely a supernatural gift, a special dispensation of Divine favour; at the same time we must not suppose him as perfectly passive, doing nothing himself; we know that he was a student, active and untiring, he laboured for the acquisition of knowledge, and so labouring God aided him to a degree which no other man ever enjoyed; "none like thee:" before thy reign, or after thee in the same position. If we consider the character of Solomon's petition, which was for wisdom to perform kingly duties, we shall understand aright the limit and extent of the promise.

Ver. 13. "Have given thee that which thou hast not asked;" so said our Saviour, "seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," Matt. 6:33; this is God's law of giving; the greater, the spiritual blessings, He gives us if we seek them; the lesser, the temporal blessings, He often adds unsought.

Ver. 14. A conditional promise of length of days, these were to depend upon obedience, this was only partial so the promise was not fulfilled; Solomon would certainly not be more than sixty at his death.

Ver. 15. "A dream;" mentally so, but none the less a Divine revelation, and an assurance of Divine purposes towards him; "came to Jerusalem;" where the Ark was, the tabernacle being in Gibeon, perhaps the last public service in Gibeon, and a transfer of sacrificial worship to the divinely chosen spot where thenceforth vows and offerings were to be made; "offered burnt offerings;" signifying entire consecration; "peace offerings;" offerings of communion and friendship; "a feast to all his servants;" which naturally followed the peace offerings, the flesh of the animals offered in sacrifice was eaten by the worshipper, his friends and the priests. This was the sacrificial feast of which we have many instances in those earlier books.

HINTS TO TEACHERS.

Topical Analysis.—(1) God's offered gift, 5; (2) Solomon's choice, 6-9. (3) The gift bestowed, 10-15.

On the first topic let us note that the vision of Solomon and the choice of gifts offered to him came at the close of a public religious service. Solomon loved the Lord and sought to honour Him before the people, and bring the people to honour Him also; his heart was full of consciousness of the mercies of God, mercies to his father David, mercies to the nation and mercies to himself; his position then and there as King over Israel, was a manifest token of the grace of God, of his faithfulness to the covenant with

David, and of his purposes of love; so with devout gratitude Solomon would confess all this before the people and by a solemn religious service inaugurate his reign over God's people. It was not so far back to the days of Eli and to him had come the message from God; "them that honour me I will honour," and Solomon was now realizing the fulfilment of that promise in the gracious condescension of the proffered gift. Teach, that the same promise holds good to-day; to all who love and honour God the word comes, "ask what I shall give thee." "Hitherto," said the Saviour to His disciples, "have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." God stands, so to speak, with His infinite blessings waiting to bestow them upon His children if they only ask. What shall they ask? What does Solomon teach us? Let us see.

On the second topic we find that Solomon's choice was based on a realization of his duties; it was from the fact that he had been chosen to reign over that great people, an office requiring the highest wisdom, that he felt the need of "an understanding heart." Here is a lesson for us and our scholars; every servant of the Divine Master has his work, yet how often is he oppressed with a sense of his inability to do that work aright, and in bitterness he is often tempted to give up, and to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" no one, not one of themselves, but our sufficiency is of God. Do any desire to be made useful in the service of God, yet fear that they cannot do the work, let them ask of God the wisdom they need, "that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not," Jas. 1:5. But may we ask for lower, for temporal blessings, yes, in submission to the Divine will, for we know not, when we leave the region of spiritual things, what are really blessings; like little children we choose too much by appearance or by our own limited knowledge, and the things we think a blessing may prove a curse; there is such a thing as God hearing a prayer in anger and answering it in wrath. With reference to all these things, our hearts must say "Thy will be done." Teach, that it is acceptable to God that we ask the best gifts. The greatest and best gift of God to man is His Son, the free and full salvation that comes through His atoning death; and the next best gift, if we may reverently compare the gifts of God, is the Holy Spirit, and our "Heavenly Father," is ready, we are told, to "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him," Luke 11:13; in that gift are included all gifts of wisdom, understanding and guidance. That you may realize something of the blessings this gift brings, consult the following passages, selected from many others of the same character: John 7:38-39; 14:16-17; Acts 9:31; Rom. 8:14; 8:26; 15:13; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:6-16, Eph. 2:18; let us then pray as we sing,

"Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers."

On the third topic note that the request pleased God; it was not a request for himself but for the benefit of others, he had not asked riches, or honour, or what was so dear to ancient monarchs, victory over enemies; he had asked for that by which he could be a blessing to the people over whom he was called to reign, and it was this unselfishness of choice, this desire to consecrate everything to God and his chosen nation, that made his request acceptable and pleasing to God. Let us learn that he who humbly seeks to be a blessing, will both be one and get one. Further, with the highest gift God gave the lesser, unasked gifts. Where the best gifts are asked it is a proof that the lesser may be safely added. The man who does not look upon temporal blessings as the best thing is the least likely to misuse them, or be unduly exalted by their possessions; it is only those who know the true value of the highest gifts that can be trusted with the lesser ones. God has given to the world his grandest gift, the gift of His Son, and the Apostle asks with triumphant assurance, He who has done this "shall he not, with Him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32, "So also every one that forsaketh houses—for my name sake shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life," Matt. 19:29; and "Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. 4:8. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think," Eph. 3:20.

INCIDENTAL TRUTHS AND TEACHINGS.

To every young man there comes, consciously or unconsciously, a time of choice and decision, and upon that the whole of his future depends.

We are not likely to attain anything greater than the thing we desire.

We should ask God to help us, that we may be a blessing to others as well as ourselves.

If we feel our inability rightly to perform our duties let us ask God to help us.

If we truly ask the best things, God will give them to us.

If we have not the blessings we need, it is because we have not asked for them.

It is a privilege and a duty to ask; God says to all "Ask." If the choice came to us as to Solomon, what should we ask?

Something the Bible says about true wisdom.

The wisdom of God, Psa. 104:24; Prov. 8:18-20; Jer. 10:12; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 3:10.

The spirit of God the spirit of wisdom, [Ex. 31:3; Acts 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:8.

Wisdom the gift of God, Prov. 2:6; Dan. 2:23; Jas. 1:5.

Wisdom is offered to all, Prov. 2:2; 3:20; 4:7.

The fear of the Lord that is wisdom, Job. 28:28; Psa. 111:10; Rom. 8:33.

The truly righteous are truly wise, Psa. 37:80.

Wisdom will be manifested, 1 Kings, 8:28; Prov. 10:31; Dan. 2:4.

The graces of wisdom, Jas. 1:17.

The blessings of wisdom, Prov. 3:18.

The value of wisdom, Prov. 8:11; 16:16; 19:8.

Jesus Christ, wisdom incarnate, 1 Cor. 30:1-24:30.