

The Sunday School

BIBLE LESSON.

Abridged from Peloubet's Notes.

Second Quarter.

ELIJAH'S SPIRIT ON ELISHA.

Lesson VI. August 7.—2 Kings 2:6-15.

Read the Chapter. Commit Verses 11-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.

How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Luke 11:13.

EXPLANATORY.

THE CALL OF ELISHA.—1 Kings 19:19-21. We know almost nothing of Elisha's early history. He seems to have belonged to a well-to-do family of Abel-meholah in the Jordan valley. Suddenly Elijah came to him while he was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and threw his mantle over the young man, as an invitation to follow him, and become a prophet. Elisha naturally hesitated. But Elisha did not hesitate long. From this time he was the attendant and scholar of the prophet, but of an entirely different nature, and with different methods of doing the Lord's work. He was of the city rather than the desert, and more like "the still, small voice" than the hurricane and earthquake.

THE TEST OF ELISHA.—When the time came for Elijah to leave his earthly work and to be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, the prophet was at Gilgal, north of Bethel, with Elisha at one of the schools of the prophets. Elisha seems to have received some revelation that his last hours had come.

He bade Elisha remain at Gilgal while he went on to the next school at Bethel. But Elisha insisted on going with him. This was repeated at the other stations, Bethel and Jericho, on the direct way to the fords of the Jordan. Why Elisha asked Elisha not to accompany him is not certain. But (1) he may have desired to be alone in that supreme moment. (2) He may "have wished to spare Elisha the pain of parting." (3) He may have been uncertain whether it was the Lord's will that any should behold his glorification. He would avoid all ostentation. (4) It most probably was, perhaps together with the other motives, to test the devotion and love of Elisha, to see whether he was a fitting successor. Elisha was so different in temper from himself, that although he was chosen at God's word, and although he had become acquainted with him during the past few years, Elisha may have felt uncertain whether he were fitted to carry on his work. It is so hard to realize the greatness and power of those who work in ways foreign to our natures.

ELISHA'S HIGH REQUEST.—Vs. 6-10. 6. TARRY, I PRAY THEE, HERE. They were at Jericho, and Elisha was on the way to the fords of the Jordan, where he could cross over into his native country.

7. THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS. That is, the young men attending the theological seminaries first organized by Samuel for the preparation of religious teachers for the people.

8. AND ELIJAH TOOK HIS MANTLE. Of sheepskin. The cloak, that outward sign of the prophet's office, became the vehicle of the Spirit's power. AND WRAPPED IT TOGETHER. "Rolled it up" like a rod, for convenience in handling. SMOTE THE WATERS. As Moses "smote" the River Nile (Ex. 7:20), Aaron the dust (Ex. 8:17), and Moses the rock (Num. 20:11)—strongly, as one smites an enemy.

9. ON THE FARTHER SHORE ELIJAH SAID UNTO ELISHA, ASK WHAT I SHALL DO FOR THEE, BEFORE I BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THEE. What is your last request, the one supreme thing you desire me to do? He had no money, no estates, no title to leave his friend, but he well knew that such things were not first in Elisha's mind, for he had left all these when he chose the prophet's work. LET A DOUBLE PORTION OF THY SPIRIT BE UPON ME. Not twice as much as Elijah had, but the portion of the eldest son (Deut. 21:17). The eldest son was the successor of his father, the head of the household. Elisha's request was that he might be fitted to be Elijah's successor, to take up the work he had left, and carry it on, in the schools of the prophets and among the people, by the power of working miracles, by divine revelations, by influence for the salvation of his nation, by a holy life, by faith, and courage, and wisdom, and zeal. He did not ask so much for the position as for spiritual fitness for the work.

10. THOU HAST ASKED A HARD THING. It was hard because it was a spiritual gift, the hardest of all things to impart to another. It was hard because it depended on the fitness of the receiver. It was hard because it was the greatest of gifts, worth more than riches or thrones. It was hard because the granting of this request was not in Elijah's gift, and he knew not yet if God meant to bestow it; yet he would seek it with the fervent prayer (Jas. 5:16, 17)

that brought abundant showers from heaven (1 Kings 18:42-45). IF THOU SEE ME, WHEN I AM TAKEN FROM THEE. The words "when I am" are not in the original. If he was able to retain to the end the same devoted perseverance, and keep his eye set and steadfast on the departing prophet, the gift would be his. "If thou see me." But how could he see him if he did not watch? Ah, that is the whole doctrine! Look, expect, watch; keep your eyes open, fixed, intense,—look as if you wanted the blessing, and you will get it.

ELIJAH'S TRIUMPH OVER DEATH.—Vs. 11, 12. 11. THEY STILL WENT ON, AND TALKED. So did the two disciples on the way to Emmaus talk together. Much of the heavenly wisdom that has blessed the world can be traced back to communion with saintly men and women in the "border-land." THERE APPEARED A CHARIOT OF FIRE, AND HORSES OF FIRE. The Hebrew word for "a chariot" is usually a collective noun, and means "chariots," as in the margin of the R. V. There was some marvelous display of flame and fire.

AND ELIJAH WENT UP BY A WHIRLWIND. The earthly means of carrying up his body, before the transformation to the spiritual body of heaven (1 Cor. 15:42-49).

Symbols. (1) It was a symbol of the life thus ended, sudden, glorious, fiery like lightning flashes, full of mysterious power from heaven. (2) The close of Elijah's life was like the sunset glories after a day of storm and sunshine. Often these radiant clouds seem like the gate of heaven. (3) The chariot and horses of fire were symbols of the divine presence and power. As the fire transforms the material into the invisible, so this fiery storm would manifest the power that transformed Elijah's physical body into the spiritual body fitted for its heavenly life.

12. THE CHARIOT OF ISRAEL, AND THE HORSEMEN THEREOF! By the words MY FATHER, MY FATHER, Elisha expresses what the departing one was for himself; and by the words, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," what he was for the whole nation. "One" such man as Elisha is more than equivalent to an entire army. Such was Luther for the German people.

The Difficulty.

BY CHARLES E. JEFFERSON.

No man can pray in a hurry, or meditate in haste, or study with a hundred duties standing at the door and shouting at him. But the modern preacher has little time. He goes through the week on a hop, skip and jump. He is in a constant flurry to meet his next engagement. He is a Martha busied about many things. The better part has been taken from him. A thousand odds and ends of parish work keep him in a frenzy of activity, which saps the springs of intellectual energy and spiritual life.

Brethren, we have now reached the root of one of the great problems of our day. The various distressing pulpit phenomena, which we all lament and whose correction seems to be beyond our skill, can nearly all be traced, I think, to the crowded and feverish life which a modern minister is obliged to live.

It is lack of time which is cutting pastors short. Preaching becomes thin and laymen rebel. Preaching is thin because preachers are thin. Preachers are thin by endless activity. A man, to keep intellectually robust and spiritually rich, must have leisure for contemplation and wide study. Pastors are becoming short, not because preachers are lazy, but because they are so busy in doing things that they preach themselves empty in three or four years. Many a minister's lamp goes out simply because he has no time to supply himself with oil.

It is lack of time which is partly responsible for evangelists, and for the numerous cheap devices adopted by preachers for wheedling men into church attendance. If preachers do not have time to read great books and assimilate great ideas, it is not surprising they should fall back on pictures and choirs, and call in as often as possible an outsider to lighten the drudgery of their sermonic work. The increased dependence on traveling preachers is, in my judgment, one of the most ominous and deplorable signs of the times.

And how shall we account for the absence of that fire without which preaching is vain? It is the result of meditation. The Psalmist says: "While I mused the fire burned." Without musing there is no burning. James Russell Lowell, in one of A sermon is nothing unless touched with emotion. Emotion cannot be manufac-

his letters, says: "My brain requires a long brooding time ere it can hatch anything. As soon as the life comes into the thing it is quick enough in clipping the shell." From London he wrote to a friend: "I am piecemealed here with so many things to do that I cannot get a moment to brood over anything as it must be brooded over if it is to have wings. It is as if a sitting hen should have to mind the doorbell. That is the experience of the preacher. He is piecemealed. He is the victim of the doorbell. He cannot hatch his thoughts fairly out as he goes along."

If preachers are to speak for God they must be given time to find out what God says. The words of John the Baptist rolled out upon his hearers like molten lava because he had brooded so long over the soul's need and God's will that when he emerged from the desert there was a fire burning in the marrow of his bones. Jesus in the quiet of Nazareth meditated and mused through the years until he was caught up by a spirit which carried him from the shop to the cross.—Congregationalist.

Agonizing Pains.

Endured by Those Who Suffer from Sciatica.—A Victim Tells How to Obtain Relief.

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Mr. Hayes voluntarily testifies to the truth of the above statement before Edward Whosed, Esq., J. P. and his statements are further vouched for by Rev. J. N. Barnes, of Stanley, N. B.

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