

S. S. Lesson Department.

ANECDOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION. (Lesson for April 6th.)

Robert Hall, the great preacher, referring to his life-long physical malady—severe pain in the back—says, "I presume the Lord sees I require more hammering and hewing than almost any other stone that was ever selected for his spiritual building, and that is the secret reason of his dealings with me. Let me be broken into a thousand pieces, if I may but be made up again, and formed by his hands for purposes of his mercy. I see more and more of the unspeakable blessedness of being made like God, and becoming a partaker of his holiness. I see it, I say, but I do not attain, or, at least, in so unspeakably small a degree, that I have every reason to be abased, and repent in dust and ashes."

Another minister of a former age, on recovering from a dangerous illness, was one day visited by a friend who expressed his fear that the disease would leave him so prostrated in body and mind as to prove nothing but a serious misfortune to the church, without bestowing any compensating advantage upon himself. The good man answered, "you are mistaken my friend; for this six weeks' illness has taught me more divinity than all my past studies, and all my ten years ministry put together." He meant, doubtless, that his affections had been weaned from the world, and his soul brought into more conscious fellowship with God.

It is related of one, (a slave we believe) who, under great severity, had fled from the worst of masters to the *Azi*—to Christ Jesus, the "friend of the wretched and helpless"—that he was so impressed with a sense of the benefit he had derived from his sore trials, that when lying, on his death-bed, and seeing his master standing by, he eagerly caught his hands, and kissing them, exclaimed with great pathos, "These hands have brought me to heaven!" Thousands besides him have had reason to bless God for their afflictions, and for oppressions also, when they have been the instruments in his hands of promoting the salvation of their souls.

DIFFICULTY OF ACCESS TO THE MONARCH.

(See Lesson for April 20th.)

The Greek historians, says Kitto, give many incidental statements concerning the difficulty of access to the Persian king. The rule seems to have been that even when the king was in his outer apartments, no one was admitted to his presence uncalled, or unannounced; and that when the king was in his interior residence, not even the most dignified inhabitants of the interior palace might presume to appear before him unbidden. The historians relate that the freedom of access to the sovereign's presence was first checked by Dejeos, king of Media, who directed that no one of whatever rank, should appear before him unless specially called, but that all business should be transacted through messengers and ministers, his

nearest attendants only being allowed to see his face. The Persians adopted this and other regulations from the Median Court; hence we may understand the distinction allowed to the seven princes (Esau 1: 14) "who saw the king's face," that is, who might appear before him uncalled. Even these, however, were not admitted, when any of the king's wives were with him; and this restriction enabled the king to see them as little as he pleased. One of the privileged nobles, who disobeyed the excuse, cut off the ears and noses of the two doorkeepers, for which he and all his family (excepting his wife and eldest son) were punished with death (Herodotus i. 99; iii. 118.) It is difficult to imagine the intense veneration with which the royal person is and has been regarded in Persia and other countries of the East.

A Chinese author has said that "all the roads lengthen as they approach the throne." In old times the emperor was sufficiently accessible to the complaints and suits of his subjects. But for many ages past great care has been taken to prevent him from being annoyed with the petitions of individuals, or representations adverse to the men in power. When the emperor appears in public, indeed, the inferior mandarins have the right of kneeling by the way side, and of holding up any memorials they wish to submit to the sovereign, who sends to take them from their hand; but this procedure is often dangerous to the party from the notice it attracts. The Roman Catholic missionary Castiglione once undertook the responsibility of presenting a petition to the emperor, as his majesty was in the room where he painted. But although Castiglione was a mandarin, and as such entitled to present a petition in the ordinary way, he violated the law by this private presentation. The emperor turned pale with astonishment and said to him, "Thou art a stranger; thou knowest not our laws; but what thou hast done deserves death." The monk knew this before; but was willing to face death for the cause to which his life was devoted, and to which this petition related.

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Prepared for the "Christian Helper" by the
Rev. J. W. A. Stewart, B.A.

April 6.—Sanctified Affliction.—Job 33:
14-30.

GOLDEN TEXT.

My sin despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.—Heb. 12: 5.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

This book was always considered by the Jews as part of the sacred canon. It is recognized as such in the New Testament, for Paul introduces his quotations from it by the words, "It is written." (1 Cor. 2: 19.) Some believe the book to be strictly historical; others call it a religious drama based upon facts; others still, regard it as a religious fiction. It is probable that the narrative of the book was an exact relation of facts, but the poetical form of the dialogue renders it unlikely that the very words of the various speakers are given. That Job himself was a real and not an imaginary person, appears from Ezra 14: 14-20; James 2: 21-25, 5-11.

The authorship of the book is ascribed by some to Job himself; by others to Moses. Some think that Elihu was the author, and that in ch. 32: 15-17, he is addressing the reader. It is impossible to be certain with regard to the author of the book, or the period at which it was written. The archaic forms with which the language abounds, proves the antiquity of the book. Then, as there is no reference whatever to the Mosaic ritual, and the history is probably older than the wilderness period. It is generally thought that Job lived during the time of the Egyptian bondage; though, certainly, the religious views expressed in the book seem rather advanced for that period. If the book of Job is not the oldest in the world, as very many suppose it to be, it is certainly one of the most wonderful. It has been called "the most remarkable monument of the Semitic mind."

The first two chapters and the last chapter are in prose, the rest is poetical, and the poetry is of a very high order, unsurpassed for dignity and grandeur.

The object of Job's trial seems to be the refutation of the charge made by Satan that selfishness was the mainspring of Job's righteousness. By this severe trial and its results, it is shown that a man who had no clear certainty of a future life with its rewards and adjustments, could yet submit to terrible calamities without abjuring the service of God. In desperate trouble, and without the prospect of any release from woe in this life, his soul seems, through the instincts of his great soul, to discern a future, which shall bring a solution of his difficulties. It must be remembered that Job and his friends were ignorant of the special occasion of this trial, and their discussion of the mystery of Providence brings out several important lessons. The mystery, however, is left without any real solution, and when God at last appears and speaks, He does not clear away the clouds from the subject. Instead of explaining why He deals with men as He does, He points to His works, which display His love, His wisdom, and His omnipotence. And these works are beyond our comprehension, how shall we understand the greater wonder of His dealings with men. It should be enough for us to know that all things are in the hands of One who is infinite in power and in wisdom. Our true position is absolute trust in that One. "Here alone the finite comes into harmony with the Infinite, and finds true peace; for if it refuses to trust until it can comprehend, it must be in eternal discord with God and with itself."—Smith's Bib. Dict.

INTRODUCTION.

The best introduction to the lesson is the reading of the previous part of the book. It is not necessary to suggest this to the teachers for themselves, but they may need to suggest it to their scholars, and to point out the wonderful attractions of this book to them, so that they may desire to read. Let us try to make our scholars Bible-readers.

Elihu the Busite. Buz and Uz were the two sons of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The family of Elihu had retained the knowledge of the true God, though Gentiles, as Job himself was. In the lesson of to-day, Elihu brings forward for the first time, his peculiar theory, that it is the voice of mercy which speaks through the judgments of God, calling men away from their sins to God. Elihu's discourse is carried on to the end of the 37th chapter. It is generally supposed that the last part of his discourse is uttered just as a great storm is coming on, which ushers in the theophany.

EXPOSITION.

V. 14. *God speaketh.* God does not look with indifference upon those who walk in the paths of sin. He utters a warning voice again and again, yet none understand its meaning. Elihu thinks that Job is one of those who will not understand the voice of God.