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Fourth Quarter.

Lesson VI. Nov. 10. 2 Sam. 18: 18-33.

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bear him."—Prov. 17: 25.

EXPLANATORY.

I. ABSALOM'S REBELLION. In our last lesson we saw the handsome, attractive, but unprincipled Absalom scheming against his own father.

II. DAVID'S RETREAT. King David, sick in body (Ps. 41: 3), sick at heart at the conduct of his eldest living son, sick in soul with the consciousness of past sin, and the prophecy on account of it that "the sword should not depart from his house" (12: 10); not knowing how strong the conspiracy was in the capital itself, unprepared with an army of defence, the attack being wholly unexpected, and loath to make war against his own son, immediately retreated from the city. There is no single day in the Jewish history of which so elaborate an account remains as that which describes this memorable flight. The events of this day are told in the 15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of 2 Samuel.

INCIDENTS BY THE WAY. As they began to descend the Mount of Olives to the northwest, Ziba met them with bread, fruit and wine, and declared that his master, Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, took sides with the usurper. David naturally believed him, and hastily and unjustly gave him all his master's property. Further along, down towards the Jornan valley, at Bahurim, while the procession was walking along one side of a ravine, Shimei, another member of the house of Saul, walked on the other side and shouted bitter curses upon David and threw stones and dust at him.

III. ABSALOM TAKES POSSESSION OF THE CAPITAL. Absalom and his army, marching from Hebron, take possession of Jerusalem and the palace that same day. A council of war was called, and Ahithophel, whose counsel was "as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God," advised an immediate attack upon David while he was weary and unprepared. But Hushai, secretly David's friend, argued against this course and advised Absalom to wait till he could gather a great army. The latter advice was taken. Then Abithophel, seeing that Absalom, by not folging his advice, was doomed to failure, and in that case he himself would be executed as a traitor when David was restored, went home to Giloh and hanged himself. "Ahithophel bears the distinction of being the first person whose hanging is recorded.

IV. THE DECISIVE BATTLE. Absalom soon followed his father across the Jordan and encamped a few miles south or southwest of Mahanaim. David prepared to receive the attack with his usual skill. He divided his forces into three bodies under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, and yielding to the people's entreaties, he himself remained to hold out the city in case of a defeat. The armies met in "the forest of Ephraim," in Mount Gilead, where the entangled ground was most unfavorable to the untrained hosts of Absalom. They were overthrown with a slaughter of 20,000 men.

V. THE DEATH OF ABSALOM. Amid this scattered fight Absalom was separated from his men, and as he fled from a party of the enemy, the mule on which he rode carried him beneath the low branches of a spreading terebinth and left him hanging by the head, probably in a forked bough. Two things are to be noted as contributing to Absalom's fate: the ostentation of going into battle on the mule, which marked his rank as prince, instead of on foot, like David and all the great warriors; and the vanity of wearing his hair in a style only becoming to a Nazarite.

18. *Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar.* This is mentioned to show how the plans of the wicked are disappointed. Absalom was buried in a pit in the forest of Gilead, and covered with a heap of stones, while he had thought to rest under a beautiful monument near the capital, known and praised of all. *In the king's dale.* The place is unknown. *I have no son.* His three sons (chap. 14: 27) must have all died young. *Absalom's place*: literally, *hand, i. e.*, a monument, which is like a hand pointing to the character of him who is buried under it.

ABSALOM'S HAND. Absalom from out the far-off past is still pointing our modern youth to certain great lessons his career, teaches us: (1.) The way of transgressors is hard; (2.) The success of the wicked is short, and then he is like chaff which the wind bloweth away; (3.) Sin is sometimes attractive at first, but at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder; (4.) The way to true success is not through disobedience to parents; (5.) No failure is so terrible as the failure of a life; no ruin like the the ruin of a soul; (6.) The death of the wicked is lighted by no ray of hope; (7.) They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.

VII. DAVID RECEIVING TIDINGS FROM THE BATTLE-FIELD.—*Zadok.* The high priest; David's friend in Jerusalem. *Let me now run, and bear the king tidings.* He wished to go in order to tell him the good news, how his kingdom was saved, and to break to him gently the sad news of Absalom's death.

20. *Thou shalt not bear tidings this day.* Joab wished to save the young man from carrying news which he knew would hurt the king's feelings.

21. *Cushi.* The word has the article here and throughout the chapter, except at the second mention of his name in this verse, where it may easily have fallen out. It is, therefore, most probably "the Cushite" (the Ethiopian), a foreign slave, perhaps of Joab's, whom he did not scruple to expose to David's anger.

22. *Let me . . . also run after Cushi.* He was a well-known runner (ver. 27). Joab consented to his going because he thought that the Cushite had the start and would get there first.

23. *Ahimaas ran by the way of the plain.* A longer but level route, so that he could get along faster than the Cushite, who went over the hills and through forests.

24. *And David sat between the two gates.* The two gates are the outer and inner gate of the fortified city wall, between which there was a small court, where David was sitting. Here David waited, with intense anxiety the result of the battle. *The watchman went up to the roof over the gate.* There was usually a tower over the gateway, and on its roof as part of the wall, the watchman could see a long distance.

25. *If he be alone, there is tidings.* David concluded that if his army had been beaten, the highways would have been crowded with fugitives.

26. *Called unto the porter.* The "captain of the gate," who had it in charge. *Behold, another man running alone.* The Cushite. He also, being alone, must be the bearer of despatches, later than those of the first. The two thus following one another so quickly implied important news.

27. *Is like the running of Ahimaaz.* There is a great deal of individuality in running, and practised food-racers are known and recognised at a distance by their gait, as Ahimaaz was, long before their features could be known. *And the king said, He was a good man.* David had reason to think well of him, not only for Zadok's sake, but also for the bold and faithful service he performed in carrying from Jerusalem to the Jordan the plans of Absalom. *Cometh with good tidings.* Knowing Ahimaaz to be a brave man, David concluded that he would not be the first to run in a defeat; hence he must be a bearer of news of victory.

28. *All is well!* literally, *peace.* The one word of the breathless runner was at once the usual salutation, and a report of the battle. "Peace" meant victory; the enemy overthrown and a glorious return to Jerusalem.

29. *Is the young man Absalom safe:* His first thought, after he knew that the kingdom was safe, was for the fate of his wayward son.

IS THE YOUNG MAN SAFE? This is a question every parent and every friend of young men should ask. Is the young man safe from intemperance, from bad companions, from bad books, from dishonest conduct, from bad habits? Is he safe in Jesus Christ? Is he safe in a good home and among good influence? Is he safe for this world? Is he safe for eternity? Ask yourself also what you are doing to make him and keep him safe.

VIII. DAVID MOURNING OVER HIS DEAD SON. *And the King was much moved.* His bodily frame could scarcely bear the burden of this loss. *And went up to the chamber.* To be alone in his sorrow. The deepest sorrow "treads the wine-press alone.' *And wept.* "Tears are the safety-valves of the heart." *O my son, Absalom!* There is not in the whole of the Old Testament a passage of deeper pathos than this. *Would God I had died for thee.* So Moses (Ex. 32: 32) and so St. Paul (Rom. 9: 3) would have sacrificed themselves, had it been possible, to save others.

THE CAUSES OF DAVID'S GRIEF. (1) The tenderness and depth of a father's love for his beautiful but reckless son; his oldest living son and natural heir. (2) "There was also the hopelessness of this dreadful separation between him and his boy. When the infant of Bathsheba died, he could say, 'I shall go to him,' but on this occasion there is no such comforting assurance. (3) One of the bitterest ingredients in this cup of sorrow was the consciousness that his own sin was partly the cause of Absalom's fate. It was part of the doom uttered by the prophet, "The sword shall never depart from thy house." Twice now had the sword slain his sons. All his efforts to prevent it had been in vain. Had David not failed in his example, and in his training, perhaps Absalom would have been a different young man.

Scolding is Never in Order.

Many a father who will not strike his child feels free to scold him. And a scolding mother is not always deemed the severest and most unjust of mothers. Yet, while it is sometimes right to strike a child, it is at no time right to scold one. Scolding is, in fact, never in order, in dealing with a child, or in any other duty of life.

To "scold" is to assail with noisy speech. The word itself seems to have a primary meaning akin to that of barking or howling. From its earliest use it has born a bad reputation. In common law, "a common scold" is a public nuisance, against which the civil authority may be invoked by the disturbed neighborhood. And it is true to-day as it was when spoken by John Skelton, four centuries ago, that—

"A sclaunderous tunge, a tunge of a skolde,
Worketh more mischiefe than can be tolde."

Scolding is always an expression of a bad spirit and a loss of temper. This is as truly the case when a lovely mother scolds her child for breaking his playthings willfully, or for soiling his third dress in one forenoon by playing in the gutter which he was forbidden to approach, as when one apple-woman yells out her abuse of another apple-woman in a street corner quarrel. In either case the essence of the scolding is the multiplication of hot words, in expression of strong feelings that, while eminently natural, ought to be held in better control. The words themselves may be different in the two cases, but the spirit and method are much alike in both. It is scolding in the one as in the other, and scolding is never in order.

If a child has done wrong, a child needs talking to; but no parent ought to talk to a child while that parent is unable to talk in a natural tone of voice, and with carefully measured words. If the parent is tempted to speak rapidly, or to multiply words without stopping to weigh them, or to show an excited state of feeling, the parent's first duty is to gain entire self-control. Until that control is secured, there is no use of the parents trying to attempt any measure of child-training. The loss of self-control is, for the time being, an utter loss of power for the control of others. This is as true in one sphere as in another.

An admirable work on "Dog-Training" says on this very point to the dog-trainer: "You must keep perfectly cool, and must suffer no sign to escape of any anger or impatience; for if you cannot control your temper, you are not the one to train a dog." "Do not allow yourself," says this instructor, "under any circumstances, to speak to your pupil in anything but your ordinary tone of voice." And, recognizing the difficulties of the case, he adds: "Exercise an unwearied patience; and if at any time you find the strain upon your nerves growing a little tense, leave him at once, and wait until you are perfectly calm before resuming the lesson." That is good counsel for him who would train a dog—or a child; for in either dog training or child-training, scolding—loud and excited talking—is never in order.

In giving commands, or in giving censure to a child, the fewer and more calmly spoken words the better. A child soon learns that scolding means less than quiet talking; and he even comes to find a certain satisfaction in waiting silently until the scolder has blown off the surplus feeling which vents itself in this way. There are times, indeed, when words may be multiplied to advantage in explaining to a child the nature and consequences of his offence, and the reasons why he should do differently in the future; but such words should always be spoken in gentleness, and in self-controlled earnestness. Scolding, rapidly spoken censure and protest in the exhibit of strong feeling, is never in order as a means of training and directing a child.

Most parents, even the gentler and kindlier parents, scold their children more or less. Rarely can a child say, "My parents never scold me." Many a child is well trained in spite of his being scolded. Many a parent is a good parent notwithstanding the fact that he scolds his children. But no child is ever helped or benefitted by any scolding that he receives; and no parent ever helps or benefits a child by means of a scolding. Scolding is not always ruinous, but it is always out of place.

If, indeed, scolding has any good effect at all, that effect is on the scolder, not on the scolded. Scolding is the outburst of strong feeling that struggles for the mastery under the pressure of some outside provocation. It never benefits the one against whom it is directed, nor yet those who are its outside observers, however it may give physical relief to the one who indulges in it. If, therefore, scolding is an unavoidable necessity on the part of any parent, let the parent at once shut himself, or herself, up in a room where the scolding can be indulged in without harming any one. But let it be remembered that, as an element in child-training, scolding is never, never in order.—*S. S. Times.*

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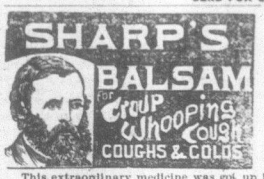

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