Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Select Notes.)

Lesson VIII. May 22. Dan. 1: 8-21.

DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS.

QUARTERLY TEMPERANCE LESSON.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank."—Dan. 1: 8.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE CAPTIVES.—We learn from the verses previous to the lesson, that King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that from among the captives should be selected a number from the highest families, and such as should give the best promise of talent and ability, to be trained in the language and literature of the Chaldeans. This custom of taking young men of the finest parts from a captive or subject race to fill responsible positions about the king has prevailed in many despotic governments, and is essentially the usage of the Turkish empire to this day. It finds its motives, (1) in the fact that such monarchs need men about them of the very first abilities; (2) in the difficulty they would experience in getting young men of such ability from among their own people who might not, by virtue of their social position or connections, become dangerous to the throne. Four were selected from the Jewish captives, the chief of whom was Daniel. The others were the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who afterwards were cast into the fiery furnace and escaped unharmed.

II. THE TEMPTATION.—8. *Daniel purposed in his heart.* He determined what he would do, and then took the wisest possible plan for gaining his object. *He would not defile himself with . . . the king's meat, i. e.,* food. It was the food appointed by the king for those who were in training for the court. He would be defiled or polluted by it, because, probably much of the food prepared for the table of the king of Babylon was such as the Jews regarded as unclean; probably that which rendered the royal provisions unclean in Daniel's estimation was the universal custom among the heathen of consecrating each meal by offering a portion of it to their idols, and pouring out libations of wine in their honor. *Nor with the wine.* He has probably seen (1) its effect on others; (2) the bad company and danger into which it led. Probably these were far worse at Babylon than in Palestine.

III. THE TEMPTATION RESISTED. 8. *He requested of the prince of the eunuchs.* His name was Ashpenaz (ver. 3). Eunuchs were employed to such an extent in Oriental royal households that the word *eunuch* came to be used as synonymous with officer. The prince of the eunuchs was simply the lord chamberlain, or the chief officer in charge of the king's household. *That he might not defile himself,* as noted above. He must have thus confessed his religious scruples, and his adherence to the God of his fathers. Daniel did not believe in the maxim "when at Rome do as the Romans do," in its application to moral questions. It is well when applied to mere matters of custom or etiquette. But in morals he would do, not as the Romans do, but as they ought to do. And this is the only way to make the world better. Note what he did on another occasion (Dan. 6: 10).

9. *Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love.* The favor of others toward the godly is the doing of God. So in Joseph's case. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, all good gifts of body, mind, and soul are ascribed directly to the divine favor. Since Daniel might reckon upon treatment hard for the young to bear,—the sneers, the shrugs, the taunts, which fall so keenly upon the raw sensitiveness of the youthful spirit,—the thing most essential to smooth his path was the favor and kindness of the chief of the eunuchs.

10. *The king, who hath appointed your meat.* It appears that the king's sincere object was to secure in them the very best mental and physical development that could be attained. Ashpenaz certainly expected that the more luxurious diet would affect their bodies favorably. *Why should he see your faces worse liking.* Less beautiful, fresh, healthy. The prince was afraid that the faces of those committed to his care would become thin and wasted and ill-favored from improper nourishment. His idea was, that high living is essential to health and good looks,—a very common mistake. *Than the children.* Youth, young men. *Of your sort.* Your circle or age. Their companions in training and study. *Endanger my head.* Be exposed to having his head cut off in punishment for his disobedience. "In the arbitrary and despotic courts of the East, a slight disobedience is often punished with death by a capricious monarch. Nebuchadnezzar was not a man to take liberties with."

11. *Melzar.* Melzar, having the article in the original (*the* Melzar), is not a proper name, but means *the chief butler* (*Cowles*) or *steward*, the one who had charge of their food. Daniel applied to him, because he was the one who actually furnished the food. But the implication is, that Daniel had permission from the chief to make the experiment; otherwise it would have been disobedience and insult, and unworthy of Daniel. *Hananiah,* etc. See under ver. 8.

12. *Prove thy servants . . . ten days.* A period which would indicate the probable result of the entire experiment. *Give us pulse to eat.* Leguminous plants, or their seeds: as beans, peas, etc. The word is derived from the same Latin and Greek words (*puls, pultis*) as our word *poultice*, made from the meal of pulse. "Grain, vegetables, herbs, opposed to flesh and more delicate food." What Daniel wanted was a vegetable diet, with water instead of wine. *And water to drink.* This, also, was a most interesting and important experiment, to show that wine was not necessary to produce healthfulness of appearance, or manly strength and beauty.

13. *Let our countenances.* Not limited to *the face*, as the word *countenance* is with us. It refers to the whole appearance, the form, the "looks." *Of the children that eat.* A number of other boys, besides these four, were undergoing the same training. *As thou seest.* According to the result of thy observations. If a thing won't stand a fair test there is no use in claiming its superiority.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE TRIAL.—FIRST. PHYSICAL RESULTS. 15. *Their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh.* (1) God may have specially blessed the obedience and faith of these young men. (2) At the same time, it is to be observed that such temperance as they practised has a natural tendency to produce the result mentioned.

SECOND. MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL RESULTS. (1) *Natural results.* By the diet they took they had their minds in some measure more pure, and less burdened, and so fit for learning, and had their bodies in better condition for hard labor. So they readily amassed all the learning of the Hebrews and the Chaldeans. Then, too, such self-denial, such courageous adherence to principle, would strengthen their character.

(2) *Results from God's blessing,* 17. *God gave them knowledge.* Some of it was direct from Him, as the visions. *Skill in all learning.* In science, in astronomy, in literature, in philosophy, the Chaldeans at this time stood at the head of the world. The great stone library which Assurbanipal founded at Nineveh, B. C. 650–620, containing over 10,000 tablets of clay written upon and hardened into stone, and from the ruins of which we are now deriving much of our knowledge of the age of Daniel, shows something of the extent of learning in this age. These contain, among many other things, legends of creation and of the deluge, with many resemblances to the Bible accounts. *And wisdom.* Power to apply and use and increase their learning. All four had the learning; the special revelations were to Daniel alone. *Understanding in all visions and dreams.* Through which God revealed the future to Daniel, and also showed him the meaning of the visions which others saw. Visions are revelations to the prophets when awake; dreams, when asleep. Before we had so much revelation in the Bible, and especially in Jesus Christ, it was necessary for God to reveal Himself to men in these ways. The divine purpose in this gift to Daniel was to quality him for transcendent influence in that heathen court and country, and to make him a prophet of high order among his own people.

THIRD. EFFECT UPON HIS FUTURE LIFE AND CAREER. 18. *Now at the end of the days.* The three years of ver. 5, fixed by the king for their training.

19. *And the king communed with them;* He himself talked with them, and tested their progress, and learning, and talents. *Therefore stood they before the king.* Were the personal advisers, and among the leading officers of the kingdom. All officers and servants *stood* when in the presence of the monarch.

20. *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding.* In everything which required peculiar wisdom to understand and explain it. *He found them ten times better.* Better counsellors, better informed. *Than all the magicians and astrologers.* The magicians were the learned class, the scribes, the priestly class, "who were connected with heathen oracles; who claimed acquaintance with the will of the gods, and who professed to have the power, therefore, of making known future events, by explaining dreams, visions, preternatural appearances," etc. The astrologers were the Magi, the wise, scientific men, the philosophers. Many in both classes no doubt used occult arts, and magic of various kinds. But this was not essential to their vocation. *In all his realm.* Not only in Babylon, but throughout the whole kingdom.

21. *And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus,* who conquered Babylon. At that time the proclamation was issued by him to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1: 1), B. C. 534.

They found out his Name.

Kate Field's Washington has this account of a police court experience: The next prisoner at the bar was a foreign-looking person, whose beard covered his features, so that it was quite impossible to say from just what country he hailed. The police justice looked up at him, then called for the German interpreter.

"Ask him what his name is," said the justice, in an undertone, to the interpreter.

"*Wie heisst du?*" said the interpreter.

The prisoner put his hand to his ear.

"*Wie heisst du?*" cried the interpreter.

The prisoner looked stupid and did not answer.

"Call the French interpreter," said the police justice.

The French interpreter could not make the prisoner understand what was wanted of him, so they called the Spanish interpreter. This man, however, fared no better than had the others, so they called the Italian and the Hebrew and the Russian and the Norwegian and the Danish and Swedish and the Turkish interpreters, but none of them could get an answer from the prisoner.

They came to the conclusion that the man was deaf, so after bawling the question at him, they wrote it down in German, French, and every other known foreign language. But the prisoner merely looked stupid, and did not answer.

They came to the conclusion that he was shamming, so they tried to intimidate him in every foreign language known.

Finally, the court policeman lost his temper.

"Why don't you tell his honor your name?" he cried.

The prisoner looked surprised.

"And sure," said he, "and is that what you are after? Why, be jabbers, didn't you say so? Me name's Dennis Mulchoonan, and I come from County Courk."

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BY JESSIE WRIGHT WHITCOMB.

I was not acquainted with the lady, but I had often seen her and heard that she was "in business"—a fact conveying to my mind the impression that she was away from home the greater part of the day. She kept house, but, as rumor had it, she kept no servant and had adopted two destitute children. But a few days ago I heard some remarks of hers which suggested that she might have commendable methods of accomplishing a large amount of work. I was waiting for my car in the Rapid Transit Transfer station when this woman and a Mrs. Banks, who was well-known as a rather talkative, inquisitive person, entered and sat down together.

"How ever do you get along, I'd just like to know! And those two strapping boys! How old are they?" asked Mrs. Banks.

"Rob is twelve and Tom is ten."

"And you make their pants and shirt waists and everything! Why do you do it?"

"Cheaper. I could hardly afford just now to keep them properly clothed if I had to buy everything for them."

"And the mending—buttons and all! Don't I know how one boy can keep me mending and sewing on buttons until I'm tired! Isn't it an awful bother?"

"No bother at all."

"O, now, that's all talk! You're mortal just like the rest of us. It must take just as much time for you to sew on a button as for anybody?"

"I never have sewed on their buttons."

"Mercy! what makes them stay? When they play with my Harry I've noticed again and again their buttons are always on—shoes and waists and pants and all. Why don't they come off?"

"They do come off."

"Just what I said. And how do they get on?"

"The boys sew them on."

"Well, since when have boys taken to sewing on buttons? I'd like to see Harry sewing one once! Why, he would let his clothes drop off first."

"Rob and Tom have no choice about it. They have to sew on their own buttons just the same as they have to comb their own hair and wash their own faces."

"But how do they know how?"

"It was no trouble to teach them that. Anybody can learn to sew on a button properly."

"It would bother me more than doing it myself. Harry would shout, 'Ma, where's a needle? Where's some thread? Ma, I can't find the scissors! Where's a button?' And then it wouldn't be done. How do you manage?"

"My boys never leave their room with a button off. If a button is off when they go upstairs, it must be on when they come down. Each boy has a little case I made him—a longish pasteboard box, the width of a large spool. Wires cross the box at even distances, and on each wire is a spool—a spool of coarse white thread, of coarse black thread, of black linen thread, and of medium size black and white thread. The box is fastened to the wall and the spools can't get away. Each boy has a pair of scissors hanging by a long ribbon to a nail by the box. Fastened to the box is a needle-book, a pin-cushion, a piece of wax and an emery. On top of the box is another box containing every kind of button on the boys' clothes. Every Saturday night they darn their own stockings. I had to darn mine when I was ten, and if a girl can a boy can.

"At any rate you make their clothes!"

"Yes, but the most I do is the cutting out and finishing. The boys do all the machine sewing, or nearly all. Rob says he could make a whole shirt waist if it weren't for the buttonholes, and I believe he could."

"Don't they object? Harry would fuss the life out of himself and complain until I went wild!"

"Probably because he would feel that you expected him to object. My boys accept the situation as philosophically as they do eating with their forks and taking baths. They are better off for doing such things. It impresses them with a sense of personal responsibility."

"They must be very queer boys," said Mrs. Banks, incredulously.

At that moment the queer boys appeared upon the scene. After hearing this conversation I naturally eyed their clothes very closely. They were unquestionably well fastened together. The ornamental buttons on their trouser knees, usually lacking in whole or in part, were all on. Their shoes were well blacked, their black stockings were well pulled up, their neckties were well tied; in fact, they seemed noticeably well dressed, though close observation failed to show that they wore a fortune on their backs.

The three left the station and I went home meditating on many things concerning boys and buttons.—*Sel.*

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