

though its moral and religious teachings may be indirect, though they may proceed by silent assumption rather than by formal assertion, they exercise an influence which is perhaps the more powerful because it is unconscious. The Bible is in continual danger of being desiccated by an exhaustive—and exhausting—scientific treatment. When it comes to be regarded chiefly as a compendium of exact statements of metaphysical doctrine, the day of its life will be over, and it will be ready for a place in the museum of antiquities. It must be a power in literature if it is to be a force in society. For literature, as a wise critic has defined it, is just “the best that has been thought and said in the world”. And if this is true, literature is certain, not only to direct culture, but also to mould conduct.

Is it possible then for wise and earnest men to look with indifference upon the course of what is often called, with a slighting accent, mere *belles lettres*? We might as well be careless about the air we breathe or the water we drink. Malaria is no less fatal than pestilence. The chief peril which threatens the permanence of Christian faith and morals is none other than the malaria of modern letters—an atmosphere of dull, heavy, faithless, materialism. Into this narcotic air the poetry of Tennyson blows like a pure wind from a loftier and serener height.

The Care of the Young.

MONTHLY EXAMINATION PAPERS.

AN Examination Paper will be set monthly on the Reign of Solomon, and on the Life of Paul. Books recommended are: *The Life and Reign of Solomon*, by the Rev. R. Winterbotham, and *The Life of Paul*, by the Rev. J. Paton Gloag, price 6d. each.; published by T. & T. Clark. Answers must be accompanied by the name, age, and address of the Candidate. Prizes will be given to successful Candidates *every month*.

EXAMINATION PAPER, II.

(Answers must be received by the 15th November.)

REIGN OF SOLOMON.

1. What part did the following persons take in connection with the succession to the throne: Nathan, Abiathar, Zadok, Joab, Benaiah?

2. Describe the anointing of Solomon.

3. What is the history of Shimei?

LIFE OF PAUL.

1. Sketch the recorded history of Stephen.

2. Mention any references which Paul makes, in speeches or letters, to his persecuting zeal.

3. How often is the story of his conversion told? What is the meaning of the words Jesus spoke to him then?

Sunday School.

The International Lessons.

MONTHLY EXAMINATIONS.

QUESTIONS will be set monthly on the International Lessons. It is intended that they should serve as an Examination of each month's work after it is finished. Accordingly, the questions will be set upon the lessons of the previous month. The name, age, and address of the boy or girl must accompany the answers each time they are sent. Prizes will be given to successful Candidates every month.

EXAMINER'S REPORT FOR OCTOBER.

1. ALEXANDER GILLIES, Main Street, Bothwell.
 2. WILLIAM C. EDWARDS, 21 Grosvenor Place, Aberdeen.
- Prizes have been sent by the publisher to these candidates.

EXAMINATION ON THE LESSONS FOR OCTOBER.

I.

For children under twelve.

1. Who said, “Except thou take away the blind and the

lame, thou shalt not come in hither”? What was meant by these words?

2. What is told us in the Lessons about Hiram and about Obed-edom?

3. Write out from memory a verse of the 32nd Psalm.

II.

For boys and girls from twelve to sixteen.

1. Describe the capture of Jerusalem by David.

2. What was the origin of the name Perez-uzzah?

3. What are the thoughts that run through David's thanksgiving prayer in 2 Sam. vii.?

4. Explain either the 3rd or the 9th verse of Psalm xxxii.

The International Lessons for November.

SHORT NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

I.

Nov. 3.—2 Sam. xv. 1-12.

THE subject is the commencement of Absalom's rebellion. It is easily broken up into two parts—(1) Verses 1-6, which show how Absalom ingratiated himself with the people; (2) Verses 7-12, which describe his conspiracy.

The only points demanding explanation are :

Verse 7.—*Forty years.* Josephus and some ancient versions read *four*, counting thus from the time of Absalom's reconciliation with David. It is difficult to fix on any date from which *forty* could be reckoned.

Verse 11.—*That were called—i.e.,* invited guests to the sacrificial feast.

This Lesson (unlike the two previous) can with little difficulty be made intelligible and interesting to the youngest children. Begin with a sketch of Absalom's previous life, bringing out his *motive* in this conspiracy—his own imperious temper, and his grudge against his father for his banishment. Then a word or two on the various points of the narrative, as they read it, will make it all fresh and clear. The chariots and men were chiefly for effect; he condescended afterwards to kiss the common people. This magnificence would impress them with a sense of the greatness of his condescension. A very hearty hand-shake would have the same meaning from a modern prince as his kiss. As an illustration, Prince Charles might be mentioned: to gain the Highlanders to his cause he donned the kilt, and condescended to dance with common people. The older pupils might be referred to Shakespeare's Richard II., Act i., Scene 4, for another very close parallel. Fix their attention on the place where Absalom met the persons he spoke to—at the gate of the city, where the king sat to decide any dispute, and where business generally was transacted. There Boaz secured the right to take care of Ruth (Ruth iv.). The story is beautifully explained in Samuel Cox's little book on *Ruth*. The Turkish government is still called the *Sublime Porte—i.e.,* the High Gate—from this custom.

Absalom's unscrupulous ambition and David's punishment are the great subjects. As for the first, notice that he had no just motive, for whatever David was, he was not severe upon Absalom. Then, he not only rebelled against his own father, but remorselessly involved so many others. His entrapping the two hundred men was especially dastardly. They were ignorant of his schemes, and, being most likely prominent citizens of Jerusalem, it was as much as their life was worth to be even supposed to share in his conspiracy. But Absalom, like Napoleon, sacrificed everybody at the altar of his ambition.

The other subject—David's punishment—may be made very interesting and profitable to the higher classes. The great lesson is that the forgiveness of sin does not include the removal of its natural consequences. There is no more striking example than this of David to be found. Think of Nathan's words: "The Lord hath put away thy sin . . . howbeit . . . *the child that is born unto thee shall surely die*". Read F. W. Robertson's sermon on *Christ's Way of dealing with Sin* (3rd series, p. 92).

II.

Nov. 10.—2 Sam. xviii. 18-33.

The Tidings of Absalom's Death.

There is not a word in this narrative that any child will have to ask the meaning of. Let them read it aloud,

without comment, that they may enjoy it—so simple, so natural, so touching it is!

Then lead them gently to the inner truth of it. They will think of Absalom erecting a monument to perpetuate his name. Probably, also, it was to serve as a sepulchre for his body when he died. What a contrast between the grand funeral he intended and his actual burial! (see verse 17). The best monument is the love of our fellow-men (like the centurion) and the love of God (who could speak of Absalom's father as "My servant David"). Show them how truthfully the character of Joab, Ahimaaz, and Cushie is pictured (much of the interest lies in that), and especially the loving heart of David himself. Cushie was simply an attendant, a slave—the "Cushite" is a better translation; *i.e.,* the Ethiopian. Ahimaaz was a personal friend of David. Joab knew David well enough to fear that his chief thought would be of Absalom, and he would not have the sad news told by a dear friend's lips. The Cushite's official message would be easier borne. The boys will enjoy Ahimaaz outrunning the Cushite, as they enjoy the furious driving of Jehu. Remind them of John outrunning Peter and coming first to the sepulchre. The lesson here is that love has fleet feet than duty.

This narrative leads into two great subjects, either of which may be chosen. The one is the folly of building one's life on treachery and deceit. Absalom's magnificent beginning and miserable ending may be likened to Napoleon's career. In counting chances, or in shaping lives, it will not do to leave out God. "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." What shall it *profit* a man? If we lose one life by leaving out God, we have not another. There is a story of a Scotsman who, in recommending honesty to his son as "the best policy," added, "for I have tried baith"; but we have only one character to shape, one life to win or lose.

The other subject is nobler still. David's conduct as a parent can scarcely be touched to profit, but his great love for his son Absalom may be used as an illustration of God's love to His children. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And especially does David's lament over Absalom illustrate God's wonderful love to *sinners*: "For the great love wherewith He loved us, *even when we were dead*". That Absalom's was a lost soul was the sharpest sting of all. David's readiness to give *his* life in place of Absalom's ("Would God I had died for thee") should be compared with God's greater gift ("God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son"); but the one was a cry of despair, the other the gospel of salvation.

III.

Nov. 17.—2 Sam. xxiii. 1-7.

David's Last Words.

A difficult lesson; but not too long for careful study.

It is David's last word—arrest the attention on that. Not that he never spoke again, but it is his last inspired utterance, his last word as Israel's sweet singer, as Jehovah's messenger to us. Montaigne, the great French essayist, says: "There is nothing of which I am so inquisitive as the manner of men's deaths, their dying words,

looks, deportment; nor is there any passage of history which takes up so much of my attention. Were I a writer of books, I would compile a register of the various deaths of people, with notes which would instruct me both how to live and how to die." Such a book (confined to *Scripture deathbeds*) is Dr. J. R. Macduff's *Sunsets on the Hebrew Mountains*. Says Shakespeare—

"The tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony".

Let us attend, then, to the words of dying David.

This is a prophecy. Now, prophecies were generally given in the form of poetry, because it was intended that they should be committed to memory. This prophecy is in poetic form, as anyone can see by noticing the *parallelism*. The Old Testament poetry has no metre, and scarcely ever rhyme, but each verse is composed of a couplet, the second line almost repeating the thought of the first. Thus we have two couplets in verse 1:

"David the son of Jesse saith,
And the man who was raised on high saith,
"The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel".

The two lines are *parallel*, and so the distinguishing mark of Hebrew poetry is its parallelism. It is very clear in Psalm cxiv. See *Aids to the Study of the Bible*, p. 47. Thus the Lesson is difficult to understand, for prophetic poetry must always be so.

1. There is first the Introduction, on to the middle of verse 3. It describes the poet, and how he was inspired by God's Spirit.

2. Then there is the great subject of the prophecy, to the end of verse 4—a righteous Ruler of men, who is to appear in the future days, clear and refreshing, like a morning of sunshine after rain.

3. David connects this great Ruler with his own family or throne, verse 5. This verse is very difficult to translate; but it is generally believed that it begins with a question, as in the margin of the Revised Version: "For is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me." He does not claim that his house is *worthy* of being connected with this righteous and glorious Ruler of men, but he claims it as a fulfilment of God's own covenant promise, made to himself by Nathan (2 Sam. vii. 12 ff.).

4. But if a righteous Ruler is a praise to them that do well, he is a terror to evil-doers, whose state is then described in verses 6, 7. They are called "the sons of Belial," literally "worthlessness," and are compared to thorns which are plucked up by the root, roughly, with iron tools, and then burnt in the field where they are.

Thus David's last words are a great prophecy of the Messiah. Though a "sweet singer" he was not often so directly a prophet. But now, with the experience of a long and much-chequered life behind him, and under the immediate inspiration of Jehovah, he looks from his deathbed clearly and calmly into the future, and sees the Righteous One arise like the morning, who will separate the wheat from the chaff, delivering the faithful from the troubles and

persecutions of life, and appointing to the wicked their due portion, "gathering the wheat into His garner, and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire". Nor is he afraid to claim his place amongst the wheat; not because of the worthiness of himself or his house, but by means of the faith which has accepted the promise. It is a worthy deathbed utterance. The opening lines closely resemble the opening of Balaam's prophecy (Numb. xxiv. 15, 16); but what a contrast between the deaths of the two prophets! "Let me die the death of the righteous," said Balaam: not Balaam, but David, shows us how the righteous die.

[An interesting note on the "Rock of Israel," verse 3, will be found on page 29 of this number of the EXPOSITORY TIMES.]

IV.

Nov. 24.—1 Kings iii. 5-15.

Solomon's Choice.

The choice was made in Gibeon. The children will remember how the inhabitants of Gibeon deceived Joshua by pretending that they had come a long journey (Joshua ix.). The town was given to the tribe of Benjamin. Later, the tabernacle was set up here, and the altar of burnt-offering, till the completion of Solomon's temple. The other great "high-places" were Ramah and Mizpeh.

The choice was made in a dream. But Solomon did not hesitate to act upon it when he awoke, and the very next scene (the judgment about the child) proves the choice was real. For Solomon's dream was a true reflection of his waking thoughts. So Jacob (Gen. xxxi. 11) and Pharaoh (Gen. xli. 25) learned God's will in a dream.

Solomon says: "I am but a little child". He means *in experience*. In age he must have been 17 or 18.

Some wonder how David can be held up, as he is in verse 14, as an example to us how we should walk. Every part of David's life is not an example, far from it, but David's *heart* was right, and if strong passion carried him away, heartfelt repentance always brought him back.

These are the only points that seem to demand a note.

The subject—the Choice of Wisdom—is admirable for young people. Wisdom they will mostly understand to be knowledge, as if both were one. Lead them to distinguish the two. Knowledge is meant to be wisdom's handmaid (see the anecdote about Hugh Miller in this number), and is chosen for them now in order to prepare them for the worthier choice after. While they learn, in day or Sunday school, they are digging trenches to be filled by God with the water of an understanding heart and a Christian character (2 Kings iii. 16, 17, and Cox's sermon thereon in the *Bird's Nest*).

But the choice of knowledge as our life's pursuit may become intensely selfish, and ruin our life. Then it is no gift of God at all, but a devil's gift rather. It was so to Adam and Eve in Eden, and it has been so to many a son of theirs since. Witness the widespread legends of the *Faust*, representing this man as deliberately, for the sake of knowledge, selling his soul to the devil. Much learning has made some men mad, for it has led them to deny the

very existence of God, and is not that madness? And even when more innocently pursued it does not always lead to wisdom. James I. is said to have possessed more knowledge than any English king, but he was not conspicuously wise.

Solomon's request was definite. He prayed for "an understanding heart to discern between good and evil," that he might be able to rule his people well. That was Solomon's life-work. God had called him to it. He therefore asked for wisdom to administer well the trust which God had committed to him. It was no selfish choice, as riches or honour would have been. But riches and honour are useful aids to a wise king who can use them well, so God added them.

God says to every child on the threshold of life: "Ask what I shall give thee". What they ask tells what they are. Some will ask wealth, and it may be given them, but what if, as in the fable of Midas, whose very food became gold, it be to starve their spiritual nature to death. Some ask honour, "the bubble reputation," and their end is the miserable one of the Pharisees, they will do everything "to be seen of men" till they forget that there is a God who sees them at all. Wisdom is far better. But let it be the "wisdom that is from above," which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits" (James iii. 17).

Anecdotes for the Sunday School.

The Art of Self-Defence.

By the Rev. ARTHUR FINLAYSON.

"HAVE you ever studied the art of self-defence?" said a young fellow to a man of magnificent physique and noble bearing.

The elder man looked at his questioner with a quiet smile, and then answered thoughtfully, "Yes; I have both studied and practised it".

"Ah!" said the other, eagerly. "Whose system did you adopt—Sutton's or Sayers'?"

"Solomon's," was the reply; "and as I have now been in training for some time on his principles, I can confidently recommend his system."

Somewhat abashed, the youth stammered out, "Solomon's! And what is the special point of his system of training?"

"Briefly this," replied the other: "A soft answer turneth away wrath?"—*The Quiver*.

The Rev. H. Price Hughes relates the following touching incident of the recent strike of London Dock labourers: "During the distribution of relief tickets, one day, a man, who was unmarried, managed to secure a ticket, but another, who had a wife and six children, failed to secure one, so great was the demand. He was going away in despair, and perhaps he already heard the cry of his starving children, when the unmarried man, realising the situation, stepped up to him. "Your case is worse than mine," said he, "take this ticket."

"The text I like best," said a little girl, "is, 'God is love'." And the reason she gave was: "Because love is always smiling".

Christlike.

I was very much struck by a criticism which I heard in Scotland respecting a devout and esteemed member of the Christian Church. It was said of him: "He is very good, but somehow or other he does not remind one of Christ". Now I understand the mystery. He had many noble and Christian qualities, but he had not that peculiar form of disinterested *Love* which is the distinctive mark of the Christlike mind.—*H. Price Hughes*.

Modern Goliaths.

For the God of David still
Guides the pebbles at His will;
There are giants yet to kill,
Wrongs unshriven;
But the battle to the strong
Is not given,
While the Judge of right and wrong
Sits in heaven.

Which is the Better?

It is said that when the daughter of Ethan Allen came to die she sent for her father. Her mother had taught her the story of the Cross, but her father had laughed "this superstition," as he termed it, into scorn. But when death came near—what a solemnity there is in it—his daughter sent for him. "Father," she began, "I am dying. All these years mother has told me to believe the Bible and Jesus Christ. You told me to believe none of these things. Now, I am going into death. Shall I believe what you have said or what mother has said?" In a voice tremulous and sad he said, "Believe your mother".

Knowledge.

It is said that Hugh Miller's geological knowledge once saved his life. He was climbing a lofty cliff, when he saw the rock before him glisten in the sun. He examined it carefully, and saw it was chlorate—a rock too slippery, as he knew, to allow a foothold—and so he turned aside. Next year a famous cragsman reached the same spot. He trod on the rock, and in an instant slipped and was shot over the precipice.

A Sharp Point.

A good story is told of the late Mr. George Dodds. He went on a deputation once with a Scotch minister to Eyemouth, to a temperance meeting, at which the minister advocated the use of alcohol as "a good creature of God". They missed their way back, and the minister, tired out, lay down by the roadside to rest. Dodds saw a hedgehog near, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and brought it to his friend for a pillow. The points soon made themselves felt. "What in the warl' is that?" said the minister. "It's a good creature of God," solemnly replied Dodds, parodying the minister's arguments for moderation.