

can in my own strength. And we soon learn that it is all a dreary failure. *Christ Himself* is the strait gate. "I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.—M. G. PEARSE.

MR. BOARDMAN tells us that one day he was passing through a large city, and having an hour to spare, he called upon an old friend, a shot manufacturer. As they were sitting together, his friend asked him "if he would like to have the world under his feet." Mr. Boardman understood the suggestion that they should go to the top of the shot tower, and at once fell in with the proposal. Presently, he reached a passage, in which he saw a stone staircase going winding up into the darkness, and he began to mount the steps. "No," said the friend, "you are going wrong;

it is down here." Mr. Boardman stopped, and thought there was some mistake. "We are going up to the top of the tower, are we not?" he asked. "Yes," said his friend, "and you must go down here to get there. *That* is the old way; dark and dusty, and full of cobwebs. But you would find a door near the top that is nailed up now. You would knock your head and get covered with dust, and then have to come down again. This is the way." And he pointed to two or three steps that went *down*. "Going down is a strange way to get up," thought Mr. Boardman. "Now, all you have to do is to sit still." "But I can never get up by sitting still, surely?" "Trust me," was the reply, "and you will see." Instantly they began to rise. They were on a lift; and in two minutes they stepped out, high above the city, to find the world under their feet.—M. G. PEARSE.

The International Lessons.

Daniel iii. 13-25.

THE FIERY FURNACE.

1. "Is it true?" (ver. 14). Or, as Revised Version, "Is it of purpose?" Some see a relenting on the part of Nebuchadnezzar in these words, as if he would offer them a door of escape. "Was it purposely done that you did not bow down, or was it some misunderstanding?"

2. "We are not careful to answer thee" (ver. 16). Or, "We have no need to answer thee in this matter." We are not concerned about being delivered out of your hands; we are concerned only about worshipping the true God alone.

3. "The Son of God" (ver. 26). No one defends this translation now. The words are "a Son of God," or, "a son of the gods." But it does not follow that Nebuchadnezzar identified the form of the fourth person with the Babylonian god of fire.

SHADRACH, Meshach, and Abed-nego—these are the Babylonian names of Daniel's three companions, not their own Hebrew and home-given names; yet it is by these names that we know them best. And the reason is, that it is by these names they are called throughout this most memorable incident of the fiery furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar has returned from some great campaign in which he has been victorious, and in the pride of his heart he sets up a magnificent image in the plain of Dura, and summons all the governors and officials throughout his whole empire to assemble and prove their loyalty by bowing down before it. They came from the farthest borders, and among them came the three Jews whom he had set over certain districts as governors—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The trumpets sounded the cymbals clashed, and the host of

officials fell down in front of the image. Three men only refused to bend the knee. They are no longer the lads who with Daniel preferred plain food to defilement with the king's portion. They have grown to man's estate. But they are the same in spirit still, and they bear in mind the cutting words in which Isaiah tells how the heathen lavish gold out of the bag, and hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god, and they "set him in his place, and he standeth," and then the earnest exhortation, "Remember this, and show yourselves men" (Isa. xlv. 6-8).

Word is brought to Nebuchadnezzar, and he is filled with rage and fury. In his eyes these men were guilty of more crimes than one. They had refused to worship his god, and were therefore guilty of impiety. But his god was not carefully distinguished in this respect from himself, and so they were guilty of treason. And to all this must be added his feeling of their base ingratitude, for had he not advanced them to positions of great honour, though they were quite young and of foreign descent? But what roused the anger of this hot-tempered monarch most fiercely of all was their firm and defiant attitude when they appeared before him. We do not need to answer thee, they said. We do not know if our God will deliver us; but we are in His hands; and, in any case, we will not worship your image. They were not sure of physical salvation, but they were sure that they would trust and worship God, even though He allowed them to be slain. And calmly, unflinchingly they told the tyrant so.

And the furnace was heated seven times hotter, till the mighty men who threw them in were scorched to death by its heat. But when the king looked, a great fear came over him. The

three were walking in the midst of the fire, and they had no hurt, for a fourth was with them. "I will be with thee . . . when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. xliii. 2).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Ver. 16. Theirs is the spirit in which Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." It is the spirit in which Casabianca said, Whatever happens, I will do as my father bade me. It is the spirit in which we may still say, I will obey my conscience, my Bible, and my Saviour.—ARCHBISHOP BENSON.

Ver. 20. "Seven times hotter"—a phrase not of strict numerical import, but meaning the utmost intensity possible. This was not in itself an unwelcome circumstance to the victims. Our martyr, Ridley, slowly consuming at the stake, earnestly entreated, "Give me more fire—more fire!"—J. FOSTER.

Ver. 25. John Foster says that the furnace was to these three a place of richer delight than Paradise to Adam; for there angels walked with man in a scene where man was naturally at home, whereas here men walked with an angel in the place where only the angel was naturally at home.

Daniel vi. 16-28.

THE DEN OF LIONS.

1. "Instruments of music" (ver. 18). The translation is doubtful, but the idea is plain. The Revised Version gives in the margin, "Dancing girls."

2. "Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian" (ver. 28). The new dynasty is the Medo-Persian, represented in the image of Nebuchadnezzar by the breast and arms of silver.

MANY years and momentous events have come and gone at Babylon since the date of our last lesson. Nebuchadnezzar himself is dead, and, more than that, the Babylonian empire is at an end. The Medes and Persians have captured the city, and Darius the Mede is king. To the Jews in Babylon the change was a welcome one; and we see Daniel, now an old man, placed in a position of the highest honour and responsibility.

The three companions of his early years have had their "fiery trial"; and Daniel's own has come. He is the king's favourite counsellor, as he well might be; for Darius the Mede is no self-reliant monarch like Nebuchadnezzar; and a man of the wisdom, the faithfulness, and the experience of Daniel must have been invaluable to him. But the higher Daniel rises in the favour of the king, the lower he falls in the love of the courtiers.

Their plot to ruin him was as cunningly devised as it was skilfully carried out. Darius has one surpassing weakness—the greed of flattery. They propose to him that for a month all prayer throughout the kingdom should be offered to him alone. Let him issue an edict, and seal it with his seal. Once so sealed, it is law, and even the king him-

self cannot alter it. Darius fell into the trap. And he saw not its treachery till the same nobles came to tell him that Daniel had defied the edict, and prayed to the God of heaven as usual, with his face toward Jerusalem.

Then, like that Herod who promised the dancing girl whatever she would ask and had to give her the head of John the Baptist, Darius the Mede was exceeding sorry. Yet his oath could not be withdrawn. Very touching is his debate with himself all day long, but it could have but one conclusion. Daniel was thrust into the lion's den. It was an underground cave, no doubt, within the royal park, where the beasts were kept for kingly sport, and sometimes to be the ministers of the king's displeasure. The pictures, with which the children are familiar, of Daniel in the lion's den may be somewhat highly coloured and fanciful at the best; but in their most striking feature, the profusion of human bones, they are perhaps nearest the truth. The cave was closed and sealed with a double seal, and the night came down.

It was a momentous night to all. Daniel spent it in prayer to God; Darius tossed remorsefully upon his bed; the courtiers slept soundly, but it was their last sleep on earth. With the earliest morning light Darius hastened to the cave, and "in a lamentable voice" called Daniel's name. To his inexpressible joy, the prophet answered. "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths." To lift him out, to cast his accusers and their wives and children to the fury of these same lions, whose mouths were no longer shut, were actions equally agreeable to this heathen king, and in a line with the spirit of his time.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—John Paton gives a very remarkable account of a journey during the night through some hostile tribes in Tanna. So dense was the darkness that at a certain point where he had to descend from the top of the cliffs to the shore, he could not find the path. He says: "I feared that I might stumble over and be killed, or, if I delayed till daylight, that the savages would kill me. I knew that one part of the rock was steep-sloping, with little growth or none thereon, and I searched about to find it, resolved to commend myself to Jesus and slide down. Feeling sure I had found this spot, I hurled down several stones, but the distance was too far for me to hear or judge. At high tide the sea there was deep; but at low tide I could wade out of it and escape. First, I fastened all my clothes tightly so as not to catch on anything; then I lay down at the top on my back, feet foremost, holding my head downwards on my breast to keep it from striking on the rock; then, after one cry to my Saviour, I at last let go, throwing my arms forward and trying to keep my feet well up. A giddy swirl, as if flying through the air, took possession of me; a few moments seemed an age; I rushed quickly down, and felt no obstruction till my feet struck into the sea below. It was low tide, I had received no injury, and, wading through, I found the rest of the way easier. When the

natives heard next day how I had come all the way in the dark, they exclaimed: 'Surely any of us would have been killed! Your Jehovah God alone thus protects you, and brings you safely home.'

Psalm lxxii.

MESSIAH'S REIGN.

1. "The king's son" (ver. 1). This is the same person as in the first part of the verse. He is a king and more, he is of royal descent.

2. "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness" (ver. 3). Over the whole land there will be peace, for righteousness always brings peace. The literal translation is, "Let the mountains and the hills bring forth peace to the people in righteousness."

3. "From sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (ver. 8). "This verse," says Dr. de Witt, "describes universal dominion geographically. The 'river' and the 'sea,' meaning the river Euphrates and the Mediterranean, were the eastern and western boundaries of Solomon's kingdom, and are the starting-points in this description. Beyond the great sea it was imagined that another sea might exist, and this the absolute limit of the world."

4. "An handful of corn" (ver. 16). This is an unfortunate rendering, as the word means "abundance." Says Delitzsch: "There was a time when the mountains of the Holy Land, and especially of Judæa, were cultivated in terraces far up their sides; so that the singer of Psalm lxxii., in view of the Solomonian time of peace, can wish without exaggeration, 'may there be an abundance of corn in the land unto the top of the mountains, may its fruit wave as Lebanon.'"

In the whole Psalter only two Psalms are ascribed to Solomon, this 72nd and the 127th. But Solomon is not only the author of this Psalm, he is evidently also its subject. If it is a Psalm *by* the king, it is also *for* the king. It was composed perhaps as a prayer which the people might use in the public worship of the temple when they entreated God for the king's person and prosperity.

But it is more than a prayer for King Solomon. No earthly king ever reached its outward scope or touched its inner heart. A greater than Solomon is here.

It is a prayer for the King. And it is easily and clearly divided into five parts and a doxology—

1. A prayer that His kingdom may be righteous (1-4).
2. That it may be perpetual (5-7).
3. Universal (8-11).
4. Merciful (12-14).
5. Prosperous (15-17).

The doxology which comes at the end (18, 19) is no part of this Psalm, but has been added as a conclusion to the Book which ends here, the Second Book of the Psalter.

Now let us read the Psalm, pausing at the end of each of its five parts. Solomon may be almost forgotten. But Jesus Christ and His kingdom it will be impossible to forget. Thus the fourth part is the mercy or benignity of the King. And is it not true of Jesus that He delivers the needy when He crieth? One of the marks He gave of His Messiahship when John the Baptist sent a message of inquiry was this: "To the poor the gospel is preached." He had compassion on the multitude, and fed them; He healed them; He laid down His life for them. And if we belong to His kingdom we shall be of the same spirit, and seek to be so more and more.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—"The mountains shall bring peace" (ver. 3). Mr. Wilson tells us that once in Fiji the men were rowing their canoe to one island which was very difficult to reach, when they might easily have got to another. He asked: "Why don't you row to that one?" The men shook their heads. Jesus was not known in that island, but He was in the other, and that made a great difference. "If we go to this island," said the men, "the people will cook *for* us; but if we go to the other, they will cook *us*."—M. G. PEARSE.

"He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass" (ver. 6). A meadow covered from end to end with tall ripe grass crowned with rich dark-purple heads of blossom and seed, and rippling in light and shadow like the waves of the sea, as the sun and the wind chase each other over them, is one of the most beautiful of rural sights. . . . But let us go back to the same field when the haymakers have done their work, and how sad and desolate is the spectacle which it presents! . . . The desolation of the spectacle is greatly aggravated during a season of drought, when the sky is as brass and the earth as iron, and the pitiless sun scorches the shorn field, and it makes no effort to recover what it has lost. But how striking is the change when a shower of rain comes! The dry, faded sward begins to brighten and assume a tinge of verdure; the stubble imbibes the moisture and expands with new life and puts forth new shoots. And as the soft reviving rain continues, the healing process goes on; the work of the scythe disappears, and the hard bristles of the grass lengthen and become greener and more elastic every day, putting forth blade and blossom as of old, and attaining to their full ideal of shape and hue; until, at last, an aftermath is formed, which may be even more luxuriant than was the field in its first fresh, strong growth. . . . To the soul that is ready to despair, the image speaks with peculiar tenderness and power, and tells of love and hope and eagerness to forgive. It is to the mown grass that the rain is most beneficial; and it is sinners deeply laden with the burden of unhappiness who are the special objects of Christ's care, for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.—HUGH MACMILLAN.