From the New York Observer.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

Third Quarter.

BY REV. HENRY M. GROUT, D. D.

JULY 31.

Lesson 5.

MOSES AND THE MAGICIANS.

EX. 7: 8—17.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"They showed his signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham."—Ps. 105: 27

Central Truth:—The most startling wonders have no power to change the human heart.

The request of the Israelites for permission to go a three day's journey into the wilderness to hold a religious feast was interpreted by Pharoah as a sign of too little, and not too much, to do. Accordingly, he not only refused their request, but gave orders that their tasks should be increased. Henceforth they must furnish the same number of bricks and gather their own straw. Very soon the number of bricks began to fall short. Then the overseers were beaten. Messengers were sent to Pharoah to complain of so great severity, but with no avail. He answered roughly, and ordered them back to their burdens. As they came out from Pharoah they met Moses and Aaron, and reproached them as the cause of their increased hardships. In this new distress Moses again cried unto God, who renewed his promise of deliverance for the people, pledging to them redemption, "with a stretched-out arm, and with great judgments."

In this lesson we have an account of the beginning of the fulfilment of this promise.

And the very first thing which strikes us is the divine patience. The entire dealings of Pharoah with Israel had been ungrateful and cruel. He had degraded the kinsmen of Joseph into slaves, and murdered their infant children. He has now insolently refused their most reasonable request for leave to go where, without offence to their neighbors, they may worship. He has shown defiance of God and contempt of his ministers. And yet God is patient and condescending. He delays judgment. For a second time he directs his servants to appear before him, and this time they are to prove to him their divine commission. Pharoah will demand a miracle, and they are empowered to work a miracle before him. The wonder is actually wrought: Aaron's rod becomes a serpent.

A second point of interest relates to the magicians. Why did Pharoah send for them? What did they really do?

The wonder exhibited by Aaron left no doubt that the being who had sent him was God. But was he more powerful than the gods of Egypt? That was what Pharoah now desired to know, and for this reason it was that he sent for the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt. "And they also did in like manner with their enchantments." Does this mean that they really wrought miracles? If so, it could not have been by the help of God, but of Satan. Just what limits have been set to Satan's power, and what supernatural aid of a physical nature he is allowed to render, has not been told us. But it is not necessary to suppose that anything was done by the magicians which required such aid. They did "so" "in like manner." They went through the same motions or forms. Further on (8: 18), it is said they "did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, *and they could not.*" This would seem to make it very plain that the words, "They did in like manner," does not refer to the nature of the effects produced. In fact the magicians did nothing which is not often done by modern Eastern jugglers. To make a serpent stiff like a rod, and then suddenly restore it to life, is one of their commonest tricks. The wide difference between their "enchantments" and the supernatural power exhibited by Aaron came fully out when the rod of the latter swallowed up the others.

The effect of all this upon Pharoah was quite unlike what might have been anticipated. He was not convinced. Something more than evidence is needful in order to conviction. There must also be a willingness to see and believe. Pharoah was unwilling, and his heart was "hardened."

It would be very easy at this point to raise hard questions, and to indulge in profitless discussion. Sometimes in the course of this history the hardening is ascribed to Pharoah, and at other times to God. It could not have been in the very same sense the work of both. The history makes it plain that it came about by the wilful perversion and abuse of those very works of mercy and power by which another might have been brought to repentance. On God's part were appeals, and finally visitations of distress. What Pharoah did was to refuse to believe and obey. The result was what it is in every stubborn sinner's case—namely, increased hardness of heart. God was not disappointed in the result. He never is. It came in the form and under the circumstances appointed by himself, and as he had predicted. He so arranged that its developments should help on his great and good designs in behalf of his people. He predicted it, that Moses need not be over-much surprised and wholly cast down when it should appear. Doubtless he ordered, too, that it should be a part of the penalty of proud and long persistent rebellion. Only in degree was Pharoah's case unlike that of any other sinner who abuses divine truth and grace.

There is yet one other point which deserves distinct notice and remark. That is the gradation which marked the dealings of God with Pharoah. He began with a simple and easy demand. There was patience and forbearance at each succeeding step. It was when words and signs and delays failed that he began to use severity. Even the judicial strokes were light at first. Sore and overwhelming judgment was reserved until that only remained. God does not afflict willingly. Mercy, and not judgment, is his delight.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. Men who speak for God must expect to be required to show their credentials. Ordinarily these are not any wonderful gifts of miraculous powers. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

2. God calls his servants to no duty for which he does not equip them. If he does not now give the power to work miracles, it is because there are no exigences for which they are required.

3. There are always ready imitators of the mighty works of God who seek to do so with their enchantments. Nor is it always easy to discriminate at once between the true and the false. Only in the end is the difference fully seen.

4. Things which God permits wicked men to do, that he may overrule them for good, are in the Bible sometimes ascribed to God. But the connection makes the true meaning clear. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

5. Only the Divine Spirit can change an unwilling heart, or turn a sinner to God. Not even the most stupendous miracles can do it. There is no kind of evidence or degree of light which cannot be resisted.

6. There are no better means of salvation than those provided for us all. If men will not improve these, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

7. That which is best suited to soften the heart may be so received as to produce the opposite effect.

8. There is no greater peril than that of trifling with the calls and grace of God. Each time we do this we make our hearts the harder, and, if impenitent, lessen the prospect that we shall ever turn and live.

9. The path of peace and safety is that of prompt obedience grounded in simple faith.

AUDITOR'S NOTICE.

In the Court of Common Pleas of Centre county, No. 145, January Term, 1878: In the matter of the petition of J. D. Shugert, Esq., assignee of John Curtin, to be discharged of his trust and for authority to reconvey the balance of the property to the assignor.

The auditor appointed by the Court to take testimony and to report upon the facts set forth in said petition, will attend to the duties of his appointment on TUESDAY, AUGUST 9, 1881, at 11 o'clock A. M., at his office in Bellefonte, of which all parties in interest will please take notice.

28-3w JOHN B. LINN, Auditor.

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