

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

From the New York Observer.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON

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August 24—The Plague Stayed.—2 Samuel 24: 15-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.—2 Samuel 24: 25.

It is not certain whether the events here described occurred before or after the rebellion of Absalom. The time is not indicated in the narrative. But it is clear that David was nearing the end of his reign; and the time, it would seem, was one of general prosperity. In the midst of this David was moved to an act which was the occasion of calamitous results. That act was the very simple one of numbering the people; and yet it was treated as a great sin, and involved the people in the misery of a destructive pestilence. The moral import of the narrative will be best brought out by tracing the more important facts disclosed.

1. Sin overtaken by judgment.—Outwardly the sin was the numbering of the people. But this had been before done in Israel, and with divine approval. The wrong could not have been in the simple taking of a census. That the real sin was not in the outward act, further appears in the first verse of the chapter. For there we learn that it was the Lord himself who moved the king—allowing, as elsewhere appears, Satan to be his instrument. (1 Chron. 21: 1).

It seems that the act of numbering was but the external manifestation of a sinful state of heart; not in David only, but in the whole people. King and people were forgetting their dependence on God, and obligation to walk in his way. They looked upon the nation's greatness as their own. "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" There was also, most likely, a movement toward military aggression.

As the penalty of this the Lord offered to David his choice between famine, flight before his enemies, and pestilence, of which David chose the latter. Either would have been well suited to correct this particular sin. The pestilence struck directly at the pride of the people and also their ruler. It crippled their power. It thwarted their military ambition. Nor was it too severe to accomplish its purpose.

Are we now to look upon fire, famine, war or pestilence as judgments for sin, or corrections for moral transgressions? We should never be in haste to interpret divine providences. No doubt one reason for the permission of the things named is to teach men lessons of common prudence; as those that relate to wiser building, better agriculture, more careful drainage, and so forth. God does not disdain to teach these lower lessons. But it is incredible that he should care for that which is lower, and not care for that which is higher. Our moral instincts agree with God's word in testifying that great calamities have a moral purpose. By them God does seek to humble pride, restrain wandering feet, and let us know that sin cannot go unpunished.

2. Judgment deepening repentance.—Our Saviour has taught us that the angels shall be God's ministers in the final judgment (Matt. 13: 41). Here we find that they are his messengers of present ills. It was as the angel that smote the people became visible that the king was thoroughly humbled (v. 17).

David was already a child of God. And one sign of this appears in the fact that no sooner was the numbering completed than his "heart greatly smote him," and he said, "I have sinned greatly." But now, under the stroke of the divine hand, he bows in yet deeper penitence. He might have accused others, but he does not. He takes all the blame on himself: "These sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." Here is no complaint that the stroke is too heavy; no word of personal excuse; no shielding of self under another's fault. The spirit of the fifty-first Psalm is here. Such is the spirit of true contrition always.

Do divine visitations always work such repentance? Not always. Under them hearts may steel themselves, and grow harder. The Spirit's work must go with them. The heart must also open to the Spirit.

3. Repentance met by mercy.—"The Lord repented him of the evil" (v. 16). As applied to God, these words are startling. Is he not unchangeable? Is he a man that he should repent? As applied to God the words simply point to a change of action. He is morally unchangeable; and, for just that reason, his actions change when circumstances alter. When the sinner turns, his attitude toward him is reversed. In that sense he is said to repent.

Note here that the mercy followed upon the deepened repentance. Verse sixteen merely anticipates, in a general statement, that which further on is repeated with fuller explanation. It is

when mingled goodness and severity have wrought contrition the sinner finds mercy.

Not that the mercy came in connection with expiation. The first thing David was to do was to rear an altar (v. 18); by means of this the plague was to be stayed (v. 21).

Note that mercy did not straightway remove all the consequences of the sin. The plague was stayed, but the dead were not given back to life; the forces of a now desolated kingdom were not restored. Here is a point to be cherished in memory. Pardon is complete at once; God smiles at once on the true penitent. But this does not remove the scars of sin. Sorrows are permitted to follow; partly as God's testimony against the sin, and partly as a means of the soul's refining and discipline. Only now the ills are chastizements for good; not retributive pains, or wrathful judgments.

4. A trustful reconsecration.—That which now marks the conduct of the king is obedience prompt and cheerful. No sooner does he receive direction to "go up and rear an altar unto the Lord;" than he goes up "as the Lord commanded."

Moving to obey. David found the way prepared before him. "Araunah the Jebusite, whose threshing floor stood on the spot now about to be marked as the temple site, was beforehand with the offer of whatever the king might require: "Let my lord, the king, take what seemeth good unto him." A noble offer! But nobler yet was David's answer. He was now in no mood for a cheap sacrifice, and made reply in words whose substance is now well suited to all lips: "Nay! . . . Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

Note the loving trust in the language now employed: "The Lord my God." The sacrifice itself was an expression of the same spirit. For the burnt offering not only signified expiation, but also symbolized grateful self-surrender. In it the whole creature was consumed; and as it rose in smoking odors to God, stood for the whole being of the offerer. Thus David anew gave himself to God. Nor would he do it without cost. It was it should be, no cheap surrender.

Such is the end of true repentance always. Never does it stop with confessions and pleas. Melted by mercy, and moved by gratitude, and encouraged by divine assurances, it sets forth in self-surrendering, trustful obedience.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. The sin of Israel was by no means peculiar. The same spirit of self-glorying, and independance of God's will, is in us all.

2. Our own trials and ills may be God's visitations for such sins, mercifully designed to bring us to repentance.

3. From the final judgment there will be no escape when once it has overtaken us. The present is our day of mercy.

4. For those who seek grace by the old way of humble, trusting repentance, the door of the divine heart is wide open; expiation has already been made; pardon will be instant and complete, and whatever ills remain will be overruled for good.

5. The proof of our repentance and trust will appear in prompt obedience; child-like thought of God as our God, and a heart ready for any, however costly, offering or service he may appoint.

A Riddle for You.

GUESS MY NAME BUT AVOID MY COMPANY.

Though I do not wear a crown, I possess more influence and power than any European sovereign. I have existed from generation to generation, but am assuming more sway over the civilized world every year. I extend my authority into nearly every city and village in the British Isles. The emperor of Hades is my strongest ally, and my subjects very often emigrate to his kingdom. Strange as this may appear, yet it is a fact, that high dignitaries in Christian churches solicit my company, and at times receive from my treasury handsome gifts to enlarge and beautify their temples of worship, while many of the clergy enjoy my association.

The British government find me a warm supporter of their revenue, and employ my agents to collect it; they uphold my authority, and legislate for my large and flourishing business, in respect of the spiritual influence I exert on the population. They place at my disposal an immense number of officials, whose vocation will be mentioned further on: while they encourage me to extend my commercial relations to the colonies of India and Australia. I am at peace with all the crowned heads of Europe, but the ex-president of the United States refused me admission into the White House.

I have been given the active services of the police in the management of the trade. Magistrates, paid and unpaid, sit on the bench at my bidding, and bow to my authority, many of them are in my employment on high salaries.

Lawyers derive much of their professional business from the quarrelsome nature of my nearest friends. Lawyers spend much time pleading for and against me. Judges on circuit acknowledge that I keep them employed, and that I succeed in demoralizing more people than any other agency known. Business men I compel to leave their offices and sit in the hungry jury box at my pleasure, while I am a fruitful cause of many of their bad debts.

The medical profession are becoming disloyal to me, but I have still a large proportion under my grasp, and they constantly introduce me to new patients where I make many friends, many of them never leave my side, and die in my parlor; I show them due respect, and attend their funeral feasts.

Papas and mamas introduce me to their children at the dinner table, and allow them to join my Sunday school.

The fair sex are getting very fond of me, many of them give me a morning call, and get so enchanted with my society, they visit me again in the afternoon; many call three times a day, the last visit is always the most enjoyable.

The government are really most liberal in aiding me in the various departments of my business—they appoint men of undoubted character to see that no robbery go on when I leave my still chamber, and that no cold water falls on my head. Being partners in the concern they hold the entire amount of "preferred stock," and give me in return about three-fourths of the poor house accommodation, a larger proportion of the wards in the lunatic asylums and hospitals free of charge, while the bridewells and jails are open to my numerous customers.

It's all nonsense to say that education is an enemy to my advancement. I defy it! I have numerous schools of my own in every city and town.

While other people rest on Sunday, I have the privilege of keeping over 50,000 people at work, as I have no respect whatever for the Sabbath. The pawnbroker materially assists me in ready cash. The undertaker puts my victims out of the way at earliest convenience, and as for the publican, I supply him with all his comforts—he is the main-spring of my establishment. The coroner gets nearly all his fees through my influence.

Though millions of professing Christians give me their hospitality, I never leave until I am turned out of doors, and though they love me, I despise the respectability of their characters and delight leading them into my long dark chambers which end in ruin and death.

The cry of the broken-hearted wife never troubles me. The wail of the starving children never enters my ear. I have neither mercy, pity, or compassion for those who get ruined by partaking too freely of my cordiality. I bring down the rich from luxury to want, and the workingman and his family from plenty to pauperism and rags. It's nothing to me. Thousands of orphans are produced by my trade, but I leave them to the public charities.

I travel free on all the railways, first-class, second class and third-class, and sail in all the ocean and channel steamers. I never get sea-sick. I sometimes so captivate the officers on board with my conversation that they lose their reckonings and steer for the rocks. They forfeit their lives, but I am always saved.

As to my popularity, I am equally welcome at the banquets of the rich and the table of the peasant. I am a favorite in the palaces of kings, while the outcasts of society and the victims of delirium tremens delight in my charms. I am a public executioner myself, but sometimes the hangman relieves me in the discharge of my duties. Possessing such vast influence, my revenues are enormous; I boast myself to be the richest man in the world. Would you believe it, my income is \$900,000,000 a year, which is equal to over \$17,000,000 a week, \$2,500,000 a day, \$100,000 every hour, or over \$1,600 a minute.

I am a successful warrior—the number of human lives killed in the battle-fields of the world every year is small compared to the thousands I hurl into an untimely grave, yet I use neither shot, shell, nor torpedoes.

The devil and me we always agree— I like him and he likes me.

Having now given you some idea of the extent of my power, I leave you to guess my name. It commences with A L and ends with O L.

READER: Beware! deny him as a friend, remember what he saith: Deceitful are his many ways, they end in crime and death: Avoid his evil paths, that lead to sin and woe; Look up to heaven for help to save from such a foe. —Irish Temperance League Advocate.

Table Etiquette in Holland.

Social etiquette in Holland is not to be compared to that of the table. If the one is curious, the other is supremely droll. It is amusing to see the Dutch eat. They take their plateful as soon as they are helped, and cut it up into morsels. Then they lay the knife in front of the plate, and leaning on the table with the left hand, proceed to eat all with the fork. I never saw food eaten otherwise, except that some desserts are shoveled with the spoon instead of the fork, two spoons lying with knife and fork at each plate. All this is etiquette. Beside the plate a hand-rest is something placed, for it is necessary that one should half recline on the table. There is no such thing as changing covers, and be the courses two or twenty, they are served on the same plate, and the same knife, fork, and spoon are used. The napkins are kept in service until the washerwoman has to meet a big bill of soap! The meals are breakfast, lunch (koffij), dinner, and supper. The first meal is at any time from six to nine, and among the better class of people the guests can take it in bed if they prefer. Lunch is at twelve o'clock dinner is from four to half past five; supper is at any time—seven, nine, or eleven o'clock in the evening. Breakfast and lunch are exactly alike, except that there is tea at the former and cof-

fee at lunch. Supper consists of tea, biscuit, and pastry, and is served in the parlor quiet as often as in the dining-room.

One supper at which I was the guest I shall always remember. At nine o'clock the hostess left the card-board, spread the table-cloth, and placed the dishes. Then she brought out a spirit lamp, which she lighted with a match from the match-box on the table, and having ground some coffee in a little hand mill, she set the cafetiére over the lamp, where it boiled merrily during the meal. The bread came on in a loaf in the long basket, and was cut into thick slices and so passed around. The butter was in a little round earthen pot, each person scraping out with his own knife as much as was wanted for each piece of bread. The cheese came to table in a similar pot, and was also scraped and eaten spread on the bread over the butter. Near the bread basket, on a round tray, was a partly cut loaf of brown bread, and slices of three or four kinds of cake, including the invariable fruit cake. Preserves were placed on the cloth in a shallow dish, and it was passed round. The milk, fresh from the dairy, was drawn for the coffee from a jug that in her absence of a sideboard naturally reposed on a mat by my lady's side. After the meal a china wash bowl was brought out, and the dishes washed on a tea table by the mistress, who used the snowiest of serviettes, and neither spilt a drop nor wet her fingers. While the dish washing was going on, the family and guests remained sitting, the mistress performing her task standing where her chair had been, and the master idly puffing his reiss. All this may seem romantic, but I was annoyed, not only at the basket of bread, the sloppy scraping of butter, and the continual hissing of the coffee over the spirit lamp, but as well to have dishwater used on the table, and to have the mistress preside over it. But it was "the fashion." I might add, that the table was that of Prof. Van Lerkamer of the Hague.—Cor. Springfield (Mass.) Republican.

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Cleveland And The Colored Vote.

AN INTELLIGENT MARYLAND NEGRO GIVES HIS REASONS FOR OPPOSING BLAINE.

BALTIMORE, Aug. 7.—Wm L. Vessels a prominent and intelligent colored man has announced his intention of supporting Gov. Cleveland for the presidency. He had been a leading member of the Young Progressive Republican Club, and his absence from its meetings exciting attention, the president addressed a communication to Vessels, asking him if the rumor that he was for Cleveland and would stump the states in his behalf was true.

Mr. Vessels replies in a two-column letter. He thinks it is time for the colored men to think for themselves. In Maryland they cast more than half the republican vote, and yet had not a single member of the legislature—the sole reward being three or four small government positions. The colored race, though holding the balance of power and casting it for the republican candidates, have been recognized or rewarded. The "debt of gratitude" to the republican party was fully paid in 1860.

Mr. Vessels says: "The republican party, which was at first our friend, now claims to be our master. The votes we give as freemen to its support are claimed as the votes due it from its slaves. The shackles were stricken from our southern brothers' limbs almost a generation ago, but our minds are still in slavery. Our advice is not asked as to the party's policy, our votes are not wanted at primary elections, and if deposited they are not counted. It is only when the democrats and the republicans stand over against each other in battle array that a demand is made upon us for our help. Our ready made ballots once deposited, we are no longer wanted until the returning seasons bring around another national or state election. Then again the cry goes out that we must save the party that saved the union and gave our freedom to us. Then again we are called on to ratify the white office holders' ticket as an evidence of our gratitude for our franchise. If we elect the ticket we are forgotten, if we fail to elect, it we are forgotten, too—until the next election. We may hurrah for the old flag and an appropriation. After the election we sometimes get the 'old flag,' provided it is a very old one. The white office holders, whom our votes put in office, get the 'appropriation.' It is time that this talk of the debt owed by our race to the republican party should cease. It has been discharged again and again and again. It is time that we should take our deed of quitance.

"The democratic party owes us nothing and its candidates do not ask us for our votes. It has lived through a quarter century of defeat without our help and can win the victory now without our votes. Looking at the coming election from the stand point of one who has just severed connection with the republican party it is clear to my mind that that party is nearing death's door."

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