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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter-Lesson VI.—Nov. 10

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.—2 Sam. 18:18-33.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.*—Prov. 17:25.

ABSALOM'S REBELLION.—In our last lesson we saw Absalom scheming against his own father. In view of his father's ill health, the ungrateful son, determined to take matters into his own hand, and, having arranged for a simultaneous uprising all over the kingdom, he was proclaimed king at Hebron, and marched with his army to take possession of the capital and the throne.

DAVID'S RETREAT.—King David, sick in body, sick at heart at the conduct of his son, sick in soul with the consciousness of past sin, knowing how strong the conspiracy was in the capital itself, unprepared with an army of defence, and loath to make war against his own son retreated from the city. David, with all his family (except ten women left to keep the palace), accompanied by his famous guard of 600, left Jerusalem, and proceeded down into the valley of the Kidron, amid the wailings of the people. The high priest brought the Ark of the Covenant to take it with David, but the king sent it back to its place on Mount Zion, both because that was the place for it, and David would not disorganize the whole religious system of the nation for any private advantage. As they began to descend the Mount of Olives to the northwest, Ziba met them with bread, fruit, and wine and declared that his master, Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, took sides with the usurper. David believed him, and hastily and unjustly gave him all his master's property. Further along, down towards the Jordan valley, at Baharim, Shimei, another member of the house of Saul, walked on the other side and shouted bitter curses upon David and threw stones and dust at him. There was so much in what he said that was true to David's conscience that he forbade his servants to kill him as they desired. David and his company camped at night in the plain of the Jordan, and awaited news from the capital.

ABSALOM TAKES POSSESSION OF THE CAPITAL.—Absalom and his army, marching from Hebron, take possession of Jerusalem and the palace that day. A council of war was called, and Ahithophel advised an immediate attack upon David. But Hushai, secretly David's friend, argued against this course and advised Absalom to wait till he could gather a great army. The latter advice was taken. Then Ahithophel, seeing that Absalom, by not following his advice, was doomed to failure, and in that case he himself would be executed as a traitor when David was restored, went home to Giloh and hanged himself.

DAVID MAKES A TEMPORARY CAPITAL AT MAHANAIM.—A messenger was despatched to David telling him what might take place. That same night he broke camp and crossed the Jordan, out of immediate danger. He proceeded to the fortified town, Mahanaim, which he made his temporary capital. Here an army of Israelites was organized, and three neighboring chiefs sent in provisions. David and his people began to recover from their panic.

THE DECISIVE BATTLE.—Absalom soon followed his father across the Jordan, David prepared to receive the attack. The armies met in "the forest of Ephraim," in Mount Gilead, where the entangled ground was most unfavorable to the untrained hosts of Absalom. They were overthrown with a slaughter of 20,000 men.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.—Absalom was separated from his men, and as he fled from a party of the enemy, the mule on which he rode carried him beneath the low branches of a spreading terebinth and left him hanging by the head, probably in a forked bough. Perhaps, also, his long, thick hair got entangled but there is nothing to support the common idea that he was suspended merely by the hair. The first soldier who came up spared his life because of the king's command, and went to tell Joab. The unscrupulous chief hurried to the spot, and thrust three javelins into Absalom's heart. *Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar.* This is mentioned to show how the plans of the wicked are disappointed. Absalom was buried in a pit in the forest of Gilead, and covered with a heap of stones, while he had thought to rest under a beautiful monument near the capital, known and praised of all. *In the king's dale.* The

place is unknown. *I have no son.* His three sons must have all died young.

DAVID RECEIVING TIDINGS FROM THE BATTLE-FIELD.—Vers. 19-32. *Zadok.* The high priest; David's friend in Jerusalem. *Let me now run, and bear the king tidings.* He wished to go in order to tell him the good news, how his kingdom was saved, and to break to him gently the news of Absalom's death. *Thou shalt not bear tidings this day.* Joab wished to save the young man from carrying news which he knew would hurt the king's feelings. *Cushi.* Most probably "the Cushite" he did not scruple to expose to David's anger. *Let me... also run after Cushi.* Joab consented to his going because he thought that the Cushite had the start and would get there first. *Alimaaz ran by the way of the plain.* A longer but level route, so that he could get along faster than the Cushite, who went over the hills and through forests.

In the days when there were no telegraphs or railroads, runners took their place, and developed a high degree of speed and endurance. *And David sat between the two gates.* The two gates are the outer and inner gate of the fortified city wall, between which there was a small court, where David was sitting. He waited with intense anxiety the result of the battle. *The watchman went up to the roof over the gate.* There was usually a tower over the gate-way, and on its roof the watchman could see a long distance. *If he be alone, there is tidings.* David concluded that if his army had been beaten, the highways would have been crowded with fugitives. But one alone implied the swiftness of a trained runner with tidings. *Called upon the porter.* The "captain of the gate," who had it in charge. *Behold, another man running along.* The Cushite. The two thus following one another so quickly implied important news. *Is like the running of Ahimaaz.* There is a great deal of individuality in running, and practised foot-racers are known and recognized at a distance by their gait. *And the king said, He is a good man.* David had reason to think well of him, for the bold and faithful service he performed in carrying from Jerusalem to the Jordan the plans of Absalom. *Cometh with good tidings.* David concluded that he would not be the first to run in the defeat; hence he must be a bearer of news of victory. *All is well: literally, peace.* "Peace" meant victory; the enemy overthrown. *Is the young man Absalom safe?* His first thought, after he knew that the kingdom was safe, was for the fate of his wayward son.

Is the Young Man Safe? This is a question every parent and every friend of young men should ask. Is the young man safe from intemperance, from bad companions, from bad books, from dishonest conduct, from bad habits? Is he safe in Jesus Christ? Is he safe in a good home and among good influences? Is he safe for this world? Is he safe for eternity? Ask yourself also what you are doing to make him and keep him safe.

DAVID MOURNING OVER HIS DEAD SON.—Ver. 33. *And the king was much moved.* His bodily frame could scarcely bear his loss. *And went out.* To be alone in his sorrow. *And wept.* Tears are the safety-valves of the heart. *O my son Absalom!* There is not in the whole of the Old Testament a passage of deeper pathos than this. *Would God I had died for thee.* So Moses and so St. Paul would have sacrificed themselves, had it been possible, to save others. His wish to die in Absalom's stead was no mere extravagance of grief. David knew his own peace was made with God; he could die at any time. If Absalom were spared in life, he might yet repent.

PRACTICAL HINTS.

One of the saddest sights in the world is the one who misuses great advantages and powers for the ruin of himself and the injury of others. Better have left a good name than a good pillar.

The manner of doing an act is often almost as good an index of character as the act itself.

Is the young man safe? What can you do to make him safe? What must he himself do to be safe?

David professes desire that he had died for Absalom. He ought to have lived more for Absalom.

The saddest deaths are of those who have done only evil in life, and have no hope beyond the grave.

Those who seek to have influence and position, not by fitness for the place, but by iniquitous methods, are almost certain to be disappointed.

INDIAN BURIAL RITES.

Some of the Peculiar Customs of the North American Redskins.

When one is in the dying agony the relatives give vent to their grief in loud wails. The crying continues at intervals until death takes place, and also up to the time of burial. This cry, says a writer in the Journal of American Folk-Lore, has been by some white persons mistaken for a song or chant, but it is in no way partakes of that character; it is a genuine expression of anguish and grief. The wail or cry is interspersed with terms which express the relationship between the deceased and the person grieving. The writer has many times heard the cry of Indian men and women, and has seen the tears flow down their cheeks. There is something truly awful in the sound when men and women together lift up their voices in the wail of grief. It is far from being like a song or chant.

When the breath has left the body of the one dying, the nearest relatives, such as parent or child, brothers or sisters, husband or wife, begin with a mad zeal to strip themselves of every ornament and cut their hair, scattering shorn locks about the fireplace. The older married women who have borne children clip the hair short to the ear, while the young women part with an inch or two. Young men do not sacrifice their locks, but the older men shear theirs short. The older women pull off their leggings and moccasins and gash the flesh off their legs below the knee, lengthwise and crosswise, till the blood flows freely. All the while they wail and call upon the dead. The young men who are near relations to the deceased remove their leggings and moccasins and pierce their legs with a sharp knife until the blood runs fast from the wounds. The old men do not scarify themselves.

With every new arrival, whether the person be of near kin or not, the wailing starts afresh. By this long-continued crying, the excitement of grief, and the pain of wounds, the relatives become exhausted before the time for burial arrives, and unable to speak above a whisper. Soon after death the corpse is placed in a sitting position facing the East, and dressed in gala costume, ornaments are put upon the hair and person, and sometimes the face is painted in the same manner as the Hunga in the ceremony of the sacred pipes, this is, if the deceased belonged to one of the gentes owning a sacred pipe. The "Hunga-keunzoe," as this mode of painting is called, is done by painting the entire face red with vermilion; then a black line about the breadth of the little finger is marked across the forehead horizontally and down both cheeks to meet a line drawn across the chin, thus forming a square. A center line starts from the one across the forehead and falls along the nose to its point. This black paint is made of charcoal and prepared fat. Men, women and children belonging to the Nenebatan (sacred pipe owners) gentes of the tribe, with a few exceptions, are painted in this manner after death.

When a member of a society dies the body is taken care of by the fraternity, and the burial ceremonies are transferred from the family to the management of the society. For instance, when a member of the Mawadane Society dies the body is taken immediately after death, while the body is yet limber, to the lodge where the society is accustomed to meet. On its arrival it is placed in a sitting position, facing the East, and decked with the regalia of the society. The face of the corpse is painted in the manner in which the man while living was accustomed to paint when attending the meetings of the society. In his right hand is placed the "Ta-sha-gae," or deer's hoof rattle, which is carried only by the leader of the society. This preparation of the body is done by the relatives of the deceased and one or two members of the society. When all is complete the crier summons the members, and these wend their way to the lodge where the dead man sits as a silent host.

The Mawadane songs which were the favorites of the dead member are then sung and the rhythmic steps taken, while presents are laid on the drum; these latter are offerings toward the funeral ceremonies. As each gift is made the crier sings forth the name of the giver, that all the village may hear of the deed. While the body lies in state in the lodge, either of the family or the society of which the deceased was a member, if the person or his family are held in high respect by the tribe, the young men, those between the ages of twenty and thirty, gather together to perform a ceremony expressive of their esteem and grief. Having stripped themselves of their garments, except a breech cloth, a loop is cut through the skin of the arm, midway between the point of the shoulder and the elbow, and the end of a willow twig, about a foot long, having the leaves on it, is thrust through the loop of skin. The blood trickles down the willow stem and spatters the hanging leaves. The young men then walk slowly to the lodge where the dead lies, and stand abreast before the tent entrance, singing the funeral song, each man accenting the time by striking together two short sticks of willow. All shed tears as they sing. This song is an old one, having been handed down from an unknown past. It is the only funeral song of the Omaha tribe.

At the close of the song the chief mourner, whether man or woman, steps forth from the lodge, wailing. The young men join in the wail of the mourner, who advances with uplifted hands, and passes along the line, pausing an instant at each person. This act is an expression of thanks and acknowledgment of the sympathy and honor shown. When the end of the line is reached, the mourner retraces his steps and pulls from each young man's arm the blood-stained willow twig, throwing it on the ground. Some relatives prepare a horse, the gift being an additional acknowledgment of the honor shown the dead, which is often returned to the donors after the funeral is over. The young men, after being relieved of their willows, return to their starting point, where they dress and disband. This custom was last observed about five years ago.

The burial takes place on the third or fourth day after death. The intervening period is a busy time for those having the funeral arrangements in charge. Goods are collected from the kindred, to be given to the poor at the time of the interment. The grave, never more than four feet deep, is dug by a poor man, who is paid for his labor. The body is borne upon a stretcher made by binding two cross-sticks on two poles ten or twelve feet long; tent-poles are sometimes used for this purpose. The bed of the stretcher is woven of willow wands, on which a robe is spread, the hairy side uppermost, and pillows are used to keep the sitting corpse in position, the feet being covered with robes or blankets.

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