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mar 31-17

The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

[FROM PELOUBET'S NOTES.]

FIRST QUARTER.—Lesson 10.—Mar. 7.

READING THE LAW.—NEH. viii. 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—So they read in the book, in
the law of God, distinctly, and gave the
sense, and caused them to understand
the reading.—NEH. viii. 8.

BUILDING THE WALLS. The walls
were three or four miles long, but
they were completed in 52 days.
This seems an incredibly short time
for such a work; but he represents
the walls as everywhere existing at
the time he commenced his task,
and as only needing repairs. He
states that the work was partitioned
among at least thirty-seven working
parties, who laboured simultane-
ously. He shows that the material
for repairs was close at hand in the
debris of the walls which lay at
their base (ii. 14; iv. 2). The work-
men labored uninterruptedly. There
can be no doubt that a dismantled
fortress as large as Jerusalem, i. e.,
less than four miles in circumference,
has often been put in a state of de-
fence in a shorter time than 52
days.

I. THE GREAT MEETING.—The
time. The occasion was the celebra-
tion of the feast of the seventh
month (chap. vii. 73). The begin-
ning of every month was ushered in
as a sacred festival; but this, the
commencement of the seventh
month, was kept with distinguished
honor as "the feast of trumpets."

All the people gathered themselves
together. They came from all the
surrounding country. The numbers
present have been variously esti-
mated at from 20,000 to 50,000.

THE PLACE. Into the street, or
wide, open square or court. The
open space south of the temple. "It
received its name from the fact that
it led to the great subterranean
water-galleries and reservoirs."

THE PREACHER.—Vers. 2-4. They
spoke unto Ezra the scribe. See
Lesson 8. This is the first men-
tion of Ezra in the present book.
The scribe. One who devotes
himself to writing off the law,
hence a student and teacher of the
inspired writings. The book of the
law. The common name of the five
books of Moses, or the Pentateuch.
The book which was thus read was
probably not merely the Pentateuch,
but the whole body of sacred writ-
ings, which had been collected into
one volume by the care of Ezra, the
first great scribe, and which formed
in substance what we call the book
of the Old Covenant.

Hereafter therein... from the morn-
ing until mid-day. Or, "from day-
light." He began as soon as it was
light enough, and read on (he and
his assistants, ver. 7) till noon, that
is, for six hours or more. The read-
ing appears to have been varied by
occasional exposition (vers. 7, 8).
We must remember that there were
but very few Bibles in existence
then; they were very costly and
were kept with great care. Even
as late as A. D. 1272 it would take
the wages of a laboring man for 13
years to buy one Bible.

A. Ezra... stood upon a pulpit
of wood. An elevated scaffold or
platform, broad enough to allow 14
persons to stand upon it.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.—And Ezra
opened the book. The "book" was
a long strip of parchment, rolled upon
a stick at either end, whence it was
called a "roll" or a "scroll." The writ-
ing was in parallel columns across
it. Such as are still used in Jewish
synagogues. And when he opened
it, all the people stood up. To show
attention and respect.

Ezra blessed the Lord. He opened
the service with a prayer of thanks-
giving and praise. And all the peo-
ple answered amen. Lifting up their
hands. An appeal to God, that they
accepted the law thus read, and
would obey it. Bowed their heads,
and worshipped the Lord with their
faces to the ground. They sunk down
into the posture of humble, earnest
prayer, first falling on their knees,
and then bending forward and down
till their faces came "between their
knees."

They read in the book, in the law
of God, distinctly. That is, so that
every word could be distinctly
heard. And caused them to under-
stand the reading. They expounded
while they read. After reading a
passage, they explained and applied
it to the people.

This work of the Levites was
much the same as that of Sunday-
school teachers to-day.

REPENTANCE.—For all the people
wept, when they heard the words of
the law. They realized how differ-
ent their lives had been from the
lives commanded by God. There is
nothing like God's Word, as applied
by the Holy Spirit, to convince men
of sin. In the light of God's Word
they see how stained and dark their
characters are.

HOLY JOY.—For the joy of the
Lord is your strength. Joy, one of
the "fruits of the Spirit," is com-
mended to us in the Word of God.
THE JOY OF THE LORD is not world-
ly or sinful pleasure, but is joy in
the Lord, in his love and care. It

is the joy of perfect submission and
obedience. It is joy in doing good
to others. It is the joy of loving.
GIFTS OF LOVE. Send portions
unto them for whom nothing is pre-
pared. The effect of the Bible on
men is to make them love others as
themselves, and to seek out those
who are in need, and supply their
wants.

CONSECRATION TO GOD. A for-
mal covenant was entered into by
the people and signed by Nehemiah
and the leaders, of renewed devo-
tion to the law and the service of
God. They promised to keep the
law of Moses, to pay their tithes for
the support of the temple services,
and to keep the Sabbath holy. And
they bound themselves under a
curse to keep this covenant (Neh.
ix. 38; x. 1-39).

OBEDIENCE. They had neglected
to keep the feasts, and they im-
mediately proceeded to keep the
feast of Tabernacles. They re-
formed their worldly method of
keeping the Sabbath, and ceased
from their alliances and intermar-
riages with the heathen.

It is the duty and privilege of all
to study the Bible; for there, alone,
can we learn God's will. It is the
light on the pathway of life. It is
the guide to happiness and heaven.
It is the corner-stone of Christian
character and of national prosperity.
As soon as children can understand,
they should be taken to church and
Sunday-school.

The fruits of Bible study will be
seen in repentance and confession of
sin; in forsaking all known sin; in
consecration to God; in obedience
to the law of God; in generous giv-
ing to those in need; in better and
happier lives.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION.

Do not manifest impatience.

Do not interrupt another.

Do not find fault, though you
may gently criticize.

Do not allow yourself to lose tem-
per or speak excitedly.

Do not talk of your private, per-
sonal and family matters.

Do not appear to notice inaccura-
cies of speech in others.

Do not allude to the unfortunate
peculiarities of any one present.

Do not, when narrating an inci-
dent, continually say, "you see,"
"you know," etc.

Do not intrude professional or
other topics that the company gen-
erally can not take an interest in.

Do not talk loud. A firm, clear,
distinct, yet mild, gentle, musical
voice has great power.

Do not be absent-minded, requir-
ing the speaker to repeat what has
been said that you may understand.

Do not speak disrespectfully of
personal appearance when any one
present may have some defects.

Do not try to force yourself into
the confidence of others. If they
give their confidence never betray it.

Do not use profanity, vulgar
terms, slang phrases, words of dou-
ble meaning, or language that will
bring the blush to anyone.

Do not intersperse your language
with foreign words and high-sound-
ing terms. It shows affectation and
will draw ridicule upon you.

Do not carry on a conversation
with another in a company about
matters which the general company
knows nothing of. It is almost as
impolite as to whisper.

Do not allow yourself to speak ill
of the absent one if it can be avoid-
ed; the day may come when some
friend will be needed to defend you
in your absence.

Do not speak with contempt and
ridicule of the locality where you
may be visiting. Find something
of truthful praise and commend;
thus make yourself agreeable.

Do not contradict. In making a
correction say, "I beg your pardon,
but I had an impression that it was
so and so." Be careful in contra-
dicting, as you may be wrong your-
self.

Do not be unduly familiar; you
will merit contempt if you are.
Neither should you be dogmatic in
your assertions, arrogating to your-
self much consequence in your opin-
ions.

Do not make a pretense of gen-
tleness, nor parade the fact that you
are the descendant of any notable
family. You must pass for just what
you are, and must stand on your
own merit.

Do not discuss politics or religion
in general company. You probably
will not convert your opponent, nor
be you.

Do not spend your time in talk-
ing scandal; you sink your own
moral nature by so doing, and you
are, perhaps, doing great injustice
to those about whom you talk. You
probably do not understand all the
circumstances.

THE LITTLE HERO.

One of the pathetic little stories
which John B. Gough told with
such thrilling effect, should teach
happy, well-cared for children to be
grateful for all the good things God
gives them. The orator went one
day with a friend away up to a
small garret room.

A feeble voice said, "Come in,"
and they went in.

There was no light, but as soon
as their eyes were dilated to the
gloom, they saw, lying on a heap of
chips and shavings, a boy about ten
years of age, pale, but with a singu-
larly sweet face.

They asked the boy, "What are
you doing there?"

"Hush, hush! I am hiding."

"Hiding? what for?"

The child showed his white deli-
cate arms covered with bruises and
swollen.

"Who was it beat you like that?"

"Hush! don't tell him; my father
did it."

"What for?"

"Poor father got drunk and beat
me because I wouldn't steal."

"Did you ever steal?"

"Yes, sir, I was a thief once."

"Then why don't you steal now?"

"Because I went to the ragged
school, and they taught me, 'Thou
shalt not steal,' and told me about
God in heaven. I will not steal,
sir, if my father kills me."

Mr. Gough's friend said, "I don't
know what to do with you. Here is
a shilling. I will see what I can do
for you."

The boy looked at it a moment,
and then said:

"But, please, sir, wouldn't you
like to hear my little hymn?"

They thought it strange that, ly-
ing there without food, without fire,
bruised and beaten, he could sing a
hymn. How could he sing the
Lord's song in a strange land? But
they said, "Yes, we will hear you."

And then, in a sweet low voice
the child sang:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my infirmity,
Suffer me to come to thee.

Fain would I to thee be brought,
Gentle Lord, forbid it not;
In the Kingdom of thy grace
Give a little child a place.

"That's my little hymn; good-by!"

The gentleman went again in the
morning, mounted the stairs, knock-
ed at the door—no answer; opened
it and went in.

The shilling lay on the floor, and
there, too, lay the boy, with a brave
smile on his face, as if to make the
best of it; and so he had—for he was
dead.

In the night he had gone home.

MY TENT-MATE.

"Lights out! Lights out!"

It was the martial voice of Ser-
geant Wilcox, making his way
among the tents of Company I, to
acquaint the raw recruits with the
import of the signal known as "taps."

"Lights out!"

The voices and the footsteps grew
more and more distinct, and then
slowly receded, leaving us to dark-
ness and our own reflections.

This was our first night in camp,
and we were, for the most part,
strangers to each other, though hud-
dled together in tents of the Sibley
pattern, each large enough to shelter
a score of men.

There was one of our number,
however—a slender, blue-eyed boy
—whom I had known from child-
hood. His name was Frank. He
was one of those manly, resolute
fellows, who habitually do the right
things so naturally and so easily,
that it always seems as if, with
them, there was no alternative.

With the extinction of the lights
the hum of conversation had ceased
in our tent.

But presently the silence was
broken by a clear, unflinching voice:

"Boys, I always pray before I go
to sleep, and if there's no objection,
I'll do so now."

Then followed a prayer, commit-
ting home and friends, and all of our
dearest interests, to the keeping of
the one strong hand and loving heart
that rules the world.

Devoid of self-consciousness as
Frank was in this act of devotion,
you may be sure that the moral
courage, which prompted him to it,
amid such surroundings, did not fail
of recognition among his comrades.

In after days, when on the toil-
some march, they saw Frank's mud-
splashed figure plodding patiently
at their side, or when, in the dread
shock of battle, they beheld that
youthful visage begrimed with
dust and powder, memory recalled
their first night in the far-off camp
at Concord. "The boy that prayed"
was transfigured before them, and
under his smoke-stained features
and dusty blouse they discerned a
soul of kinship with the martyrs
and the saints of old.

Though scathless in fight, Frank
fell at last a victim of disease, and
it was my lot to accompany his sorrow-
ing mother on the homeward jour-
ney with the body of her heroic son.

In awkward attempt at consola-
tion, as the train bore us swiftly
along, I gave my testimony to
Frank's noble character and conduct
throughout his army life.

At the end of my recital, this
Spartan—no, this Christian—mother
answered with a smile:

"My boy is safe with One whom
he always loved and served, wherever
he might be. I shall see him again
some day, for I know that it is well
with him."

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