

Teachers' Department.

Sabbath School Scripture Lessons.

AUGUST 17th, 1856.

Subject.—THE TRAITOR REVEALED.

For Repeating. For Reading.
John xiii. 12-17. | John xiii. 18-38.

AUGUST 24th, 1856.

Subject.—CHRIST COMFORTS HIS DISCIPLES IN VIEW OF HIS SEPARATION FROM THEM.

For Repeating. For Reading.
John xiii. 33-35. | John xiv. 1-14.

Select Tale.

THE BAYMAN'S WIFE.

The burning heat of the Southern summer drives all persons in the city, who are not compelled to be abroad, to the shelter of their houses, to the shade of their porticoes, or the cool recesses of their little gardens. It was at the close of a fiercely hot day in August, that taking advantage of the lengthening shadows that rendered one side of the street sheltered from the sun, I went out to make my usual daily visits in the neighbourhood of my church. I met but here and there a slave hurrying by with ice swung in twine, or bearing water in a well-poised bucket upon his head.

The quarter of the city to which I was directing my steps, is situated near the Bay-side, and inhabited chiefly by a class of men who are called "Baymen," their business being fishing, lightering, and lading and unlading vessels in the lower bay; an intelligent, industrious, upright sort of men, who support comfortably their families. Several of them were regular attendants at church, and I was not a stranger in their humble homes. I had entered the narrow street which led to the group of houses by the water, when I was hailed from a house that evidently had been constructed out of the planks of a broken-up vessel.

"Hoy,—ahoy!"

I turned, and saw a stout-built man in the door, dressed in tattered canvass trousers, and a faded and torn blue checked shirt. His beard was uncut, and his aspect was that of a man who had lost his better nature by an intemperate life. "Ahoy! Heave to!" he added, in a hoarse and rather imperative voice.

I drew near the door; the fence was broken down that had once separated it from the street. "You are skipper of that tall-rigged craft up there, ain't you?" asked the man, pointing to the spire of St. John's full in view.

"Do you wish to speak with me, my friend?" I quietly asked, without appearing to notice his rude mode of addressing me; as if he would disguise his contempt of a minister under the affectation of nautical phraseology.

"Well, not particularly," he answered, carelessly; "but the old girl inside wants to say a word to you. She's bound on a voyage, and wants to know from a parson if her papers are all right."

"Do you speak of your wife?" I asked, regarding the brute with mingled pity and indignation.

"Yes, if you like it better! She's about done for! She was trying to get me to go after you, but it is too hot for a christian to put his head out, and so when I saw you coming, I hailed."

"A christian! Are you a christian, Sir?" I repeated, with a tone and expression of face that confused him.

"Well, I can't pretend much that way. All a set of impostors! Don't care to be suspected of being one. Used the word only as a saying,—like, you know. The fewer preachers in the world the better it would be."

"Is your wife dangerously ill?" I asked, as I passed him to enter the only room of the house, in which, stretched upon a mattress, supported by a sea-vessel's birth nailed against the wall, was the invalid.

The woman turned her eyes towards me and smiled a welcome, while she extended her thin hand.

"God be blessed, ever blessed, for this favour, Sir," she said in a low and weak voice, her whole appearance being that of one about to depart the body.

I recognized her as soon as she spoke as one to whom I had administered the communion the preceding month, and whose abode, being a

stranger, I had endeavoured to ascertain, unsuccessfully until now.

"Sir, I wished to see you before I died," she said, taking my hand and pressing it for a moment with fervour. "God has heard my prayer and sent you to me. Oh, Sir, pray for my husband!" and she cast a look towards him as he stood half in the door, his ear attentive to what was passing by the bed-side, while his eyes were fixed upon the water with its passing vessels.

"Mag, if you wanted to see the parson to ask him to pray for me, you might as well have saved both yourselves the trouble. If there is any prayers put up for me, Doctor," he said, looking at me with a reckless and saucy air, "it must be to the devil!"

The dying woman released my hand, and closed her eyes, while her lips moved in supplication. There was an air of patience, of years' endured patience, impressed upon her face, which told how her pious heart had long been schooled "to endure the contradiction" of her sinful husband. "I want none of your religion," he added, with an oath.

"Sir," I said, turning to him, and speaking with firmness and feeling, "are you a man?"

"Well, I reckon I am not a dog," he answered, with a sneering laugh.

"If, then, you are a man, you need the christian religion, with all that it can give to men. There are but two orders of creatures in God's universe, known to us, that need it not; one is that of the angels, who having never sinned, need no repentance and no Saviour. They are above Christianity. The other order of creatures is that of the brutes. They need not religion because they have no souls to be sanctified and saved. Angels and brutes need no Christ! But man, who has sinned, and has a soul to save, needs a Saviour,—is in need of all that Christianity can bestow. You are either above man or below him, to need no religion. If you are above man, you are an angel. If you are below man, you are a brute."

The man looked at me with a fixed and displeased gaze. He advanced a step into the room.

"This is strong language, parson, to put to a man," said he, with an air intended to intimidate.

"You acknowledge, then, that you are a man," I answered, meeting steadily his sparkling gray eyes. "God commands all men everywhere to repent. The strong language I made use of is the voice of the Word of God, which says that men without God and religion are as the brutes that perish."

The man had closed his hand into a fist, and seemed irresolute for a moment whether to vent displeasure in a blow or not.

"James," said his wife, warningly, "James, do not strike."

"No, no,—don't fear. I'll not knock a man down for quoting Scripture; but people ought to be a little delicate, Mag, how they throw such bricks at a man's hat. It ain't pleasant to be called a brute!"

"Pardon me, Sir," I answered; "I did not call you a brute. This inference you have yourself drawn. I simply said that man needs the christian religion,—only brutes and angels my do without it."

The boatman made no reply. He turned away, and walked to and fro along the broken floor of the gallery. Evidently he was thinking upon what had been said to him,—not angrily, but thoughtfully. I saw his wife's eyes follow him, and, with a look of gratitude, she said,—

"God bless you, Sir, for speaking so plainly to him. He has been a good husband, but for—intemperance and bad company. He has had but this fault, and the want of religion. Oh, Sir, when I am gone think of him; pray for him; call and see him, and talk with him! He has a soul to save. Christ died for him. He is not too great a sinner to be saved by that atoning sacrifice made for sinners. Once, Sir,—it has changed him! He is not, looks not at all, the man he was when we were married."

"I promise not to forget his claims upon me, as a christian minister," I answered.

"Thanks, Sir, thanks! I—"

Here her emotion prevented her from expressing herself further in what she was about to say. I could perceive that death was flinging his shadow over her pale features, which my presence had kindled into momentary life. I knelt down by her pillow, and offered up a prayer,

committing her departing soul to the arms of her Redeemer. At the close of my prayer she opened her eyes, and, smiling with ineffable sweetness, while her large, glorious eyes beamed with a glory borrowed from heaven, she said, in a voice touching, from its fulness of hope and love,—

"I know that my Redeemer liveth; and though worms destroy this body, yet shall I see God." James, husband, come near me; I am going away from you. Let me say, farewell!"

The boatman, who had paused in his walk up and down the gallery, to look in at the door while I was praying, now came in, and approached the bed of his expiring wife. He stood gazing down upon the floor, with his arms folded, and a look of affected indifference.

"James, come near me! Look upon me! Let me take your hand!"

He gave his hard, heavy hand into her fragile clasp, but with ill grace. Yet I could see that he was moved; that the dying face of his wife had touched a chord in his wicked heart; that he was not a dog, but a man,—a man, in whom not sin or intemperance had utterly destroyed the Divine lineaments; for only in hell is the stamp of God's image wholly effaced; this side of the grave there is hope for the veriest wretch that has ever trampled under foot the blood of Christ.

"While life's lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

He did not reply, but stood and gazed upon her. There was a holy splendour in her returning gaze, as she looked up into his bloated face and said,—

"James, farewell! I die! I am now going to that heaven, the hope of which has so long cheered me in this vale of tears. I am going to see the face of the dear Jesus whom I have loved, and who died to purchase for me a title in heaven. I am going where there is no more sin,—no more tears,—no more pain,—and no more death! The happiness of that blessed world will be eternal, and the life there without end! And here, my husband, let me bear testimony, that in dying I am sustained only by the hopes of the Gospel, which you have so often been angry with me for reading. But forgive me. I meant no reproach. Kiss me, husband!"

To my surprise he bent over her pillow, to do which he dropped himself on one knee, for there was no chair, and kissed her forehead. She smiled, and, laying her hand upon his forehead, prayed,—

"Father, glorify thy grace in making my husband a christian man. Nothing is impossible with thee."

The rough boatman's face betrayed no emotion. He seemed to guard every muscle of his features, lest they should betray any feelings. By their very rigidity, however, the outer man betrayed the secret of the inner man. He still held her hand, still remained on one knee by her side. He seemed to be bound there by fascination, and unable to resist the spell. Each moment she was sinking. The glory in her eyes faded perceptibly.

"Sir," she said to me, raising them heavily to my face, "Sir, farewell! May we meet in heaven. I thank you for your teaching and your consolation in the pulpit, and for your presence here."

Here she pressed my hands with her cold fingers.

"Good-bye, dear James! I cannot return to you, but you can come to me. Oh, my husband, in that day when we all must appear about the judgement-seat of Christ, may I behold you among those who shall stand on the right hand. Farewell! Oh, let it not be for ever!"

As she ceased to speak, I could see his chest heave, and his lips were set like a vice, to keep down the earthquake throeing within his stirred soul. But all in vain his efforts. With a sudden outburst of his deep voice, in loud groans of anguish, he broke into a passion of sobs and tears. The fountain of his heart were upriven and he leaned his head upon her pillow, and sobbed aloud like a child.

It would take an angel's reed to describe truly the expression of the face of her who was dying. It wore not a smile; but was a smile, full of holy light and joy. If in heaven the redeemed wear such faces, they are, indeed, happy. She gently drew his forehead nearer and kissed him.

"James, these tears are my joy! They show me that you love. Oh, that God may give you grace to come where I am going! Will you promise to try and come to heaven?"

"Margie, I promise—so help me, God!" he answered, in a voice firm as a rock, yet trembling with his tears.

"Then I die in peace! Saviour, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Thou hast made my cup run over!"

For a few moments she remained silent and motionless. We believed her spirit had left its tenement of clay. He gazed upon her, watching for the least sign of life. He bent over her and kissed her lips, and I could hear him mutter,—

"I am a villain,—I am a brute! I am not worthy to be so near one who is so near God. This is as near heaven as a wretch like me ought to approach! Margie, forgive me, forgive me all the wrongs to you. I knew not till now that there was a reality in religion. I see now that it was that, which made you dear to me. God forgive me! I am not worthy to live. I wish I could die here with you. I hate myself,—I loathe myself."

Suddenly, as he was thus addressing her in his remorse and anguish of soul, her lips moved. She opened her eyes, and said, with animation that surprised me, and an expression of celestial beauty,—

"Hark! hear that music! Oh, it cannot be of earth! Listen. Such strains reach my ears from heavenly choirs!"

Here she paused, and then began faintly to repeat,—

"Who are these in bright array?
This innumerable throng,
Round the"

Her voice failing her at this word, I resumed where she stopped. She took up the lines, and added, with her soul trembling between earth and heaven,—

"Them the Lamb amidst the throne
Shall to living fountains lead"

"Oh, yes, blessed Lamb of God, Jesus, my Saviour, my hope, there I shall follow thee!"

Here she seemed to be lost in rapture. Her hands were clasped. Her face shone, as the transfigured countenances of Moses and Elias when Jesus talked with them. Her eyes remained closed. She did not seem to breathe. Softly, plaintively she began to sing these words,—

"Oh, there shall rest be found—
Rest for the weary soul.

Beyond this vale of tears
There is a life above."

And all that life is love!"

"Is love,—is love,—is LOVE. Come Lord Jesus, come!"

She spoke no more. Her heart ceased its flutterings,—her features were immovable and fixed. The casket of the immortal soul alone remained before us.

The husband knelt still by her pillow. He gazed upon the dead with a look of respectful awe. He stood up, first leaving a kiss upon the insensible brow.

"You have seen, my dear friend, how a christian dies," I said, gently.

"Yes, Sir,—yes," he answered, with a superhuman effort to control his tears, "and I have known how a christian can live, Sir. That woman was an angel from God's heaven to me. I see it all. I feel it all now. It was her Christianity that made her bear with me so,—and I called it meanness. Sir, I am a brute. I have treated her like a brute, and yet she never gave me an unkind word. Those lips, now mute for ever, Sir, never uttered words only of love, gentleness, and truth. I hated her because she was so good. Her holy life was always a sermon in my eyes, and before my conscience. She was a living Bible against me and my evil life. God forgive me!"

He then went abruptly out of the room, and paced up and down the back yard. In the hot climate of this country the dead are soon committed to the ground, seldom remaining more than twenty-four hours unburied. In the morning, at nine o'clock, the coffin was carried to the church. The husband was present, serious, and deeply impressed by the services for the dead.

At the grave, when the clods of earth fell with hollow sound upon the coffin, as "earth was committed to earth," his feelings over-mastered him, and hiding his face with his hands, and leaning his head upon a tomb-stone near, his massive frame shook, and every eye was turned upon him with surprise and sympathy; for "Jim Derrick" was so well known, as I have since learned, as "the wickedest man" among the Baymen, that even his presence, decently, at the funeral, was a matter of wonder and remark by all. But they knew not the scene which had transpired by that death-bed.

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