

Teachers' Department.

Sabbath School Scripture Lessons.

DECEMBER 14th, 1856.

Subject.—THE DAY OF PENTECOST. For Repeating. For Reading. Acts ii. 1-20. | Acts ii. 1-13.

DECEMBER 21st, 1856.

Subject.—PETER'S SERMON ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST. For Repeating. For Reading. Acts ii. 1-4. | Acts ii. 14-36.

The great thing that happened to a little girl.

'May,' said Horace to his little sister, 'I have been thinking about you a good deal of late. I think you have always been a kind, helping, little sis, but now you seem to be kinder and more helping than ever.'

'O! I think so. I hope so; I am sure I ought,' she answered, energetically.

Horace looked at her in some surprise. Self-praise was so contrary to May's character, and yet her speech certainly seemed to tend that way.

'Why are you so sure, May?' he asked: 'I do not understand you.'

She colored deeply. To speak of herself, her own feelings and thoughts, was repugnant to her natural modesty of character. But now God seemed calling her to do so. She knew well that any improvement in her was His loving gift, and it seemed wrong in her not to say so. With eyes cast down, and head turned from Horace, she said in a low tone:

'Because a great, very great thing, has happened to me since you were away, Horace.'

He looked still more surprised, and gathering courage as she went on, May, continued:

'God himself has come down into my heart, and has made me know and feel His tenderness and love, and has made me sure that He is ever by my side, wherever I go, and whatever I do.'

'And does that make you kinder to me, May?'

'O! yes—yes it must. I was always glad to please you, but now in pleasing you I at the same time please Him.'

'But May,' Horace said, after a thoughtful pause, 'you always knew that God is present every where, and sees everything. This is nothing new.'

'I knew it,' she said, earnestly, 'but only knew it; now I feel it, and that is so different.'

The Lord Jesus Christ was only a kind of name or word to me before, but now—tears of earnest feeling rising to her eyes, and her voice trembling—'now He is my loving friend who has taken the whole charge of me, who goes about with me everywhere, and loves and cares for me: Oh! how He loves me.'

Horace did not speak. He looked at her in a kind of reverential admiration. After a minute's pause she went on:

'Besides, before I did not know that God was my loving Father. I called him Father, because I had learned to do so, but in general I only thought of Him as one who was watching to see when I did wrong, and to keep an account of it, and to punish me for it.'

'And now is it so very different?' he asked, looking keenly at her.

'Ah! yes,' she answered, 'Christ has taken care of all that. He knows about all my sins, and remembers what I have forgotten; and He washes out every one in his own blood; and now God is able to forgive me and love me. Oh, Horace! is not this a great thing to have happened to me?'

Horace did not answer. He turned away his head from her anxious, wistful gaze. A bitter conviction filled his mind that he, as yet, only knew the truths of which she spoke—that, as yet, he had never felt them as she did, and he could not speak.

May's heart was saddened by his silence. If he really knew Christ as his friend, would he not have been eager to say so? But she could not bear the thought this question suggested.

She turned from it to pour out her heart in prayer that God would take charge of Horace as He had done of her, and with childlike confidence that He would hear her prayers, she was comforted.

LIFE is to be hated only when it endangers our righteousness; only when its continuance would thwart the purpose of its gift. When the alternative is martyrdom or apostasy.

ETERNITY is the Divine treasure-house, and hope is the window, by means of which mortals are permitted to see as through a glass, darkly, the things which God is preparing.

Select Sermon.

The Offence of the Cross.

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

"And I brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer, persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased," Gal. v. 11.

THE religion of Jesus is the most peaceful, mild, and benevolent religion which was ever promulgated. When we compare it with any set of dogmas invented by men, there is not one of them that can stand the least comparison with it for gentleness, mildness, and love. As for the religion of Mahomet, it is the religion of the vulture; the religion of Jesus is that of the dove—all is mercy, all is mild; it is like its Founder, it is an embodiment of pure benevolence, grace, and truth. And yet, strange to say, gentle as the Gospel is, and inoffensive as its professors have always proved themselves to be, when they have acted rightly—not resisting evil, but submitting to it, whatever it might be—yet there was never anything which has caused more disturbance in the world than the Christian religion. It is not a sword, and yet it has brought war into the world; it is not a fire, and yet it has consumed many old institutions, and has burned much that men thought would last for ever; it is a Gospel of peace, and yet it has parted the dearest friends, and caused direst feuds and confusions everywhere; though in itself it is all gentleness, yet it seems as if the standard of the dove were the standard of battle, and as if raising up the peaceful cross had been the signal for war; like the blood-red fiery cross, which of old they passed through the tribes in Scotland, to provoke to battle. Strange yet strangely true, that the cross has always been an offence; that the cross has provoked the hardest battles, and the stoutest strifes which ever men had with men.

We shall discourse to you a little concerning what "the offence of the cross" is; secondly, as to how men show their offence against the cross; thirdly, we shall have a little to say to those who are offended at the cross, to show them their folly; and, lastly, shall conclude by an inference or two, for the special benefit of Christian ministers, and the Church at large.

1.—WHEREIN CONSISTS THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS?

Our limits forbid any attempt to be elaborate, and we commence by saying, That, "the offence of the cross" lies, first, in the way in which it deals with all human wisdom. The philosopher looks at the cross, and he puts his glass before his eyes and says: I cannot see anything so very wonderful in it, with this splendid glass of mine, more than can be seen by the poor, humble peasant; I don't care about such a system as that. Any simpleton can understand the cross. So he passes by and sneers at it. The man who loves controversy comes to the Gospel, and finds that there is in it pure dogmatism. Such things are said to be true, and sinners must believe them or else be damned. I shall not do it, says he; I shall not yield implicit faith; I like disputing upon points; I like controverting them; I shall not listen to your preacher who says: This is the truth, and nothing else. I will not hear the man who speaks thus authoritatively; I like men who give me margin enough, who let me believe what I like and no more; I like to use my reason and common-sense. When you come to talk to him about religion which says: Believe that or else be lost; believe that, or else be shut out of the pale of salvation, he turns on his heel, and says; I will not believe any such thing. And when he asks what it is he is to believe, he professes himself to be wiser even than that. What! says he, believe in the atonement! I can't; it is contrary to my common-sense. Believe election! why it shocks my humanity. Believe in the total depravity of human nature, and the impossibility of being saved without being born again, why, I cannot receive it for a single moment. It is not contrary to all that the schoolmen ever taught; and different from whatever any philosopher ever would have invented; I shall not receive it. And he turns away with an anathema against the cross; he cannot bear it by reason of its simplicity; if he could describe it as being so wonderful that he really could by no means make the people understand it, only that he understood it himself; or if it were some figure of which he could say—"It is most plain and palpable, I understand it all," he would not mind it. But as it is so simple and plain he turns away. He cannot bear the Gospel of the cross; it has not wisdom enough in it for him; forgetting that the knowledge of Christ crucified is the most excellent of sciences; that never is reason so glorified, as when it seats itself down under the shadow of the cross.

2.—But there is something which hurts men's pride rather more, that is, it is opposed to all

their notions of human ability. The man who is relying on his own strength does not like it. If a man preach a Gospel which tells the sinner that he has power to save himself; if he preach a Gospel which tells us Christ having died to put all men in a salvable condition, that they have only to exercise the power they have and they will be able to deliver themselves—if a man thus preach something which exalts the skill and strength of the creature, he will never offend his hearers. But if he once begins to lay the sinner down in the dust and declare, "No man can come to Christ except the Father which hath sent him, draw him;" and that in the Scriptures all men are declared to be "dead in trespasses and in sins;" then they turn away and say, "I am not going to be insulted so, to have all my powers levelled to the dust! Am I to be made into a mere machine? into a piece of clay, and to lie passive in the potter's hands? If a minister give him a little to do himself, and let him sacrifice a little to his own idol, he would drink it down "as the ox drinketh down water;" but since we lay him powerless, like the poor bleeding man, when the Samaritan met him, he says, "I will have nothing to do with you."

3. And the cross offends men again, because it goes clean contrary to their ideas of human merit. There is not a soul in all the world, that by nature loves to be stripped of all merit. No! the last thing a man likes to part with is his righteousness. I have known poor sinners stand on Sinai's top until their knees knock together, and they have held fast by their self-righteousness even there. I have known men to stand close to the place where God's earthquakes were coming under their feet, and the thunder and the lightning played above their heads, and yet they still held fast to their self-righteousness. It is a hard thing to get that away from men. You know Bunyan says when Great-heart slew Giant Despair, the giant had as many lives as a cat; well, I am sure self-righteousness has many more lives than that. It is the hardest thing in the world to kill. You may cut the evil weed self-righteousness up, but when you think you have got to the bottom of it, it will be up again before you shall sharpen your knife to cut it off once more. It is bred in man's nature. When you preach against it, O, how men will roar against you. They cannot bear that. Sometimes I receive letters from persons who say—"I should not wonder if all your congregation were all to live in sin, because you are always preaching against man's righteousness, and preaching to poor sinners to come by simple faith, and be saved by Christ." They would not "wonder" I dare say; but I should "wonder" if they did live in sin. And I bless God I have no cause to wonder about that, for a holier people you will not find this side heaven, than those who receive into their hearts the doctrine of Christ's righteousness. This we will say of them, that grace hath wrought in them good fruits! that they do walk in the fear of the Lord, in the love of one another, and in the practice of uprightness and godliness. Well, men cannot bear it, because it lowers their merits. Tell men they are a very good sort of people, then they will like it. Give people a little self-respect and they will get on. Self-respect—that is the ruin of thousands. I am sure it is when we begin to say—

"I am nothing at all, And Jesus Christ is my all in all."

that we are saved. But as long as we have respect unto ourselves, I am sure there is not much hope for us then. Nevertheless, this is "the offence of the cross," that we do not let men have any merit in the matter.

4. But there is another offence, which is a very sore one, and the world has never forgiven the cross that "offence" yet:—it wont allow any distinctions of mankind. The cross makes moral and immoral persons come to heaven by the same road; the cross makes rich and poor go to heaven by the same door; the cross makes the philosopher and peasant walk on the same highway of holiness; the cross procures the same crown to the poor creature with one talent, that he with ten shall receive. Hence, the wise man saith—"What! am I to go and be saved by the same cross which saves a man who does not know his letters?" Your fine lady says—"Am I to be saved by the same fashion as my servant girl?" The gentleman says—"Am I to be saved the same way as that chimney-sweep?" And he who boasts in self-righteousness says—"What! am I to jostle against a harlot, to elbow a drunkard on the road to heaven? I wont go to heaven at all then!" Then, sir, you will be lost. There are no two roads to heaven. It is the same road for everyone that does come there; and hence, the cross has always been offensive to men of mark and might—few kings and queens have ever bent before it. They have covered the cross up with some fine gilt ornament, and

they have said they loved it. It was not the cross they cared for, it was the meretricious ornament. If it had been the simple cross, they would have dragged it through the streets the same as Mahomet's people did the cross at Jerusalem. Thus much on the offence of the cross.

II.—This brings me now to tell how persons show their offence against the cross of CHRIST. In old times, they did it by burning, torturing, and tormenting Christians, making them suffer all kinds of indescribable agonies. But this method did not answer, and so the devil adopts other measures now. He found that the more he oppressed them, like Israel in Egypt, the more they multiplied; and so he tries another fashion. How does he do it? Not exactly by open persecution; but "the offence of the cross" shows itself sometimes by private persecution. You do not hear, all of you, of the persecution that is going on in regard to the Lord's people. Every now and then things of this sort come to our notice, though you may not hear of them; besides, how many are there who have drunken husbands, who persecute their wives incessantly because they will cleave fast to God; How many a young man, how many a young woman is there who is called to suffer persecution from father and mother and sister and brother, for Christ's sake! Persecution is not over yet it works slyly, and comes not out openly before the world. It comes not out in Smithfield, though there may not be a house in the neighbourhood of Smithfield but what reeks with it, it comes not out in an honest garb, but ever sits in a covert way. It is not the lion, but the prowling jackal, though it is as wild a beast and as ravenous as ever. And when it does not display in positive acts, it operates by means of jeers and scoffs, and by the shrug of the shoulder; and, let me say, more men have been ruined by this practice than by the direct slanders. Men who shrug their shoulders generally do a deal of mischief, though they may not know it. When sitting at a table I have mentioned a person's name, and some one has said, "Oh!" and shrugged his shoulders—the man's character was half gone! If the person had anything to say why could not he say it out, and not leave us in the dark to surmise all manner of iniquities! But men will say—"I don't perceive you; you can go to chapel as often as you like;" and yet there is the cold sneer, the jest; every idle rumour is circulated, everything that can be invented against the minister of the Gospel and Christian people—all still showing that there is an offence in the cross.

But I will tell you the patent plan now-a-days. It is not to oppose the cross; but it is to wind round the cross, and try to get the cross to alter its shape a little. Men say, "We preach the gospel, too." They alter it; they misshape it; they make it "another gospel which is not another." Let others say, if they like, that yea and nay can meet together; that fire and water can kiss each other; that Christ and Belial can be twins: the true minister of Jesus Christ cannot do that. Truth is truth; what is opposite cannot be truth. Truth is one, and that which opposes it must certainly go down. But that is the fashion. Look at very many of the churches; they say they hold the truth. Look at their articles; there are all the five points. And if you ask the minister whether they believe election? "Certainly," they say. If you ask them whether they believe all the great cardinal truths of the Gospel? "Oh, yes," they say; "certainly. We believe them, but we do not think they ought to be preached to the common people." Oh! you have a fine notion of yourselves, if you do not think the common people as good as you are, and can receive the doctrines as well as you. "Oh! but they are dangerous; they drive the people to Antinomianism; they make them 'Hypers,' and the people would be ruined." They say this; but when we write to them, they reply, "O, we are as sound as you are!" Yes; but it is one thing to be sound, and another thing to preach sound truth. I never will believe a man to be better than he says. If a man does not out with truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we like him none the better because he says he believes it—but we will like him ten times worse! We would rather he did not believe it at all than conceal his sentiments. They hide the truth, and prove that they are as much offended with the cross as if they openly tried to refute its doctrine. God send us the day when the pure, unadulterated doctrines of the grace of God, which is in Christ Jesus, shall yet be proclaimed in every chapel, and shall be heard in every street, and I received by every professed Christian.

[To be continued.]

SOME people angle for praise with the bait of humility. They condemn themselves, hoping that others will contradict them and commend them.