

Teachers' Department.

Sabbath School Scripture Lessons.

DECEMBER 23rd, 1860.

Read—JOHN xxi. 1-14: Jesus appears at the Sea of Tiberias. 1 KINGS xvii.: Elijah fed by ravens.

Recite—JOHN xx. 19-23.

DECEMBER 30th, 1860.

Read—JOHN xxi. 15-25: Christ's discourse with Peter. 1 KINGS xviii. 1-16: Elijah goes to meet Ahab.

Recite—JOHN xxi. 1-6.

MESSENGER ALMANAC.

From December 16th to December 29th, 1860.

Table with 2 columns: Name of moon phase and its time. Last Quarter, December 5, 1 45 Afternoon. New Moon, 12, 8 33 Morning. First Quarter, 20, 1 55 Morning. Full Moon, 27, 3 11 Afternoon.

Table with 3 columns: Day, SUN., MOON., High Water at. Columns include Wk., Rises., Sets., Rises., Sets., Halifax., Windsor.

For the time of HIGH WATER at Picot, Pugwash, Wallace, and Yarmouth add 2 hours to the time at Halifax. For HIGH WATER at Annapolis Digby &c. and at St. John N. B., add 3 hours to the time at Halifax. The time of HIGH WATER at Windsor is also the time at Parrsboro', Horton, Cornwallis, Truro, &c. For the LENGTH OF DAY double the time of the sun's setting.

How Christmas was brought to Migden.

AN ENGLISH CHRISTMAS STORY.

"And this is Christmas Eve!" It was a dark, dull place, and very cold. Much snow had fallen earlier in the day; the wind howled round the house as if a pack of wolves sought entrance there; and as yet the moon had not risen over Migden. A group of children covered beside the hearth, on which a mocking spark of fire still lingered; and in the corner, by a heap of clothes from beneath which came, now and again, a groan, the mother watched and pondered. Time had been when her life appeared all sunshine, when industry brought comfort to the hearth, and prudence laid up store of winter's seasons; but of late one heavy wre had fallen on another, and this night found her widowed, desolate. True, she could work, and there was work to do; but how to leave, even for an hour, her sick, perhaps dying child? "Mother," said one of the hungry little ones, starting up "a merry Christmas, and a very happy New Year!" In that place the words seemed a mockery, but she said, "Thank you," and the boy sank down again. She knew that he was starving, and very cold, and that he had spoken only to assure her that he kept a brave heart still; and tears fell fast upon the blanket and thin counterpane, that with the aid of two or three old garments, covered the trembling form of the sick child. Hour after hour was passed in that thick darkness, while the cold storm-wind brought up through the valley the sound of the church clock near which she had laid her husband, and while thoughts new and terrible rushed madly through her soul. She was alone, alone, in the wide world, with the poor little ones who clung around her;—friendless, and broken-hearted, and alone. And this was Christmas Eve! At the same hour, and in a house not half-a-mile from Migden, the same words were spoken. "Christmas Eve!" But this was in a pleasant handsomely furnished room, from which the cold night was put out by thick strong sashes and rich, well-hung drapery, while a glass chandelier threw a soft light upon a tapestry carpet, a number of luxurious chairs and couches, and on a table loaded with the dainties of the season. Nor is it a fact of mean significance, that a great fire, crowned with a genuine log, crackled and leaped in the low, polished grate. There were three persons present, and they all had Christmas faces as they discussed the meal for which a long day's journeying had prepared them. Just weary enough to enjoy the hour's repose, just hungry enough to do justice to Christmas fare, just cold enough to appreciate a fire, they might well speak in glowing terms of Christmas. Now and then a clear laugh rang on the air; the lady of the house was younger than her companions, and it was pleasant to hear her merry voice. But still the happiest

persons of the group was the guest whom they called Elinor, and it was generally some quiet wit of hers that called forth Margaret's laughter. Meanwhile the storm-wind raged and roared without, and though the moon might cast down on the pure snow strange shadows of torn clouds and gaunt old trees, the ladies wandered after dinner to the window and looked out, only to come back with new glee to their low couch, and to the ever-cosy, warm fireside. "And now," said Margaret, gaily, as she trifled with a screen, "let me tell Elinor our Christmas plans. You see we are but three, for William is bound by his uncle's will to spend every Christmas here, and none but you, dear Elinor, would leave town. However, we are determined to enjoy."

"Aye, that's it," said her husband, rubbing his hands, and nodding pleasantly, "we have resolved to do that thoroughly." "And have prepared," continued Mrs. Harper, "a real Christmas dinner, Elinor; holly and mistletoe enough to bury you,—old Mr. Harper's splendid panorama!" "Old Mr. Harper's—did I catch the word?" "No doubt; I said panorama. He was a Christmas man every inch of him; and, at a great expense, he fitted up a room in which, as regularly as the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth month came round, he exhibited a series of superior views, let me see, twelve feet by—I really forget how much—but, in proportion; of Christmas in old times, and all that sort of thing; very interesting indeed they are. So William sent two carpenters from town, and the whole will be exhibited to-morrow." "And who is coming to see it?" inquired Elinor. "Who?—who, but you and I, and our three servants? Do you want to invite any one?" "I have no friends here." "Nor have I, dear Ellen. I assure you there is no one with whom one could associate, except the attorney's widow, Mrs. Brown, at V—; and she is deaf. We can enjoy ourselves without society, I am sure. See how delightfully cosy we are to-night, while the winds roar outside." "Yes, but—may I ask you a plain question, Margaret?" "Oh, certainly; only, don't look grave at Christmas." "Well then, I ask if you can possibly go through this season thoughtlessly, enjoying yourself by forgetting those around you?" "Assuredly no,—do I forget you and William?" "I do not mean that; I refer to the very poor, to those whom He who went about doing good has bidden us remember, saying, 'When thou makest a feast call in the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' This afternoon we passed some wretched huts, would you not add to your own happiness if you gave, out of the abundance God bestows, to those who have so little?" "My dear, kind-hearted creature," replied Margaret, "there is not one deserving person in the neighbourhood; is there, William?" Her husband smiled, and answered promptly, "No—The men Migden drink, smoke, swear, and beat their wives; all the old women are supposed to deal in witchcraft; all the boys are young vagabonds; all the girls coarse and vulgar; even the mothers and the little toddling children are depraved; and if the babies lead an honest life, it is because they really cannot help it!" "Your picture is but too life-like," exclaimed Margaret. "I assure you, Elinor, everybody has tried everything; but they are low, incorrigibly low,—a set of people unworthy of your care. Every attempt to benefit Migden has done harm instead of good. One kind old gentleman, who spent three months at V—, gave clothes to all who would promise to go to church. Seventeen men came one Sunday;—by the next, every scrap was in the pawnshop. Then he gave up the healthy ones, and contented himself with sending medical comforts to the sick, until he discovered that the number of illnesses increased in an exact proportion to his application of remedies, when he became disgusted, and abandoned them altogether." "Poor man!" said Elinor; "and poor Migden, too! If he had only known how to set about it!" "If he had only had you to teach him, Ellen," said Mrs. Harper, with a smile that disarmed her satire of its sting—if, indeed, it ever had any. "You could have taught him the how, when, and where!" "I would have tried, though not in my own night," replied her friend, more seriously; "for I could never live so near those cottages without some effort for their occupants. To day, as we drove by, I longed to speak a cheerful Christmas word to the old man whom we found staring at your pretty house, contrasting it, perhaps, with his poor home." "Or plotting against my pigeons," said her host. "He is an old rogue; I could read it in his face. I assure nothing good can come out of Migden. It is one of those places from which even an apostle must have retreated, shaking off the dust of his feet, for a testimony against them!" The visitor looked surprised at his vehemence; and Margaret at some length, explained that he

spoke "feelingly," because a Migden boy had stolen some of his rare fowls last Christmas, and all the village had conspired to screen him. This did not mend the matter, certainly; and Elinor might have said a few words about the Lord's Prayer and its teachings, had not a cart-load of holly and mistletoe effected a diversion. By the time they had decorated the drawing-room, which, as being the cosiest possible, was to be occupied all next day, and given directions to the servants and carpenters as to the disposal of their portion of the spoil, Mr. and Mrs. Harper were in spirits far too high for serious conversation. Their guest, who played well, had to give them an hour's music, after which in turn recited or composed droll rhymes or wondrous tales, till a bright-looking parlour-maid brought tea, and drew the table into their very midst. After that it was Elinor alone who remembered how very different it was at Migden; how the town that let in the cold night air; how the doors cracked upon their rusty hinges; how famished children cowered around the fire—if fire they had—and at last fairly cried themselves to sleep; how some, that Christmas Eve, were even dying. "Hush!" The wind had for a moment ceased its roar, and a faint cry for help was heard without. Elinor was the first to approach the window; the first to see a figure lying in the road beyond the garden; the first to hurry down to the hall-door, and wrapped in a large cloak that somehow came to hand, to cross the lawn and ask— "Who calls for help?" The moon shone down upon the prostrate form, and the wind whirled the snow around it angrily; but neither her voice, nor the silver light, nor the cold touch of wind and snow, were heeded. A silence like that of death was all the answer. Then she went forward, and bent low enough to see a boyish face—pale, pinched with hunger, and beyond expression sad. After a while they carried the child in-doors, and laid him on soft pillows by the fire. There he revived, and looked round on them all, not brightly, but with a very earnest gaze; and comprehending, at last, what had happened, sat up exclaiming— "Bread, oh give me bread!" They gave it, and he ate as if for life. Then rising suddenly, "I must go," he cried. "The doctor had not come, and she is dying at the village yonder; and I—I started, but I had not strength." He hurried to the door. "Stay, stay," cried Elinor, "tell me who is sick?" "My sister; she has been ill ever since my father died; and the doctor lives at V—. You have been very kind; do let me go." She saw that it was cruel to detain him, and with her own hands opened the hall-door, only remarking, very quietly, that she should watch for his return to Migden. He made no answer, except an awkward bow, but Mr. Harper, having overheard her speech, inquired into its meaning. "I shall be ready by that time," she explained; "the doctor will escort me." "You are now going to Migden," said Margaret, "to-night?" "Yes." Her friends drew back, surprised. "You must be mad." She smiled, "I am not mad, most noble Festus." "Oh, ah, we know,—but, very seriously?" "I never was more serious in my life. This poor girl is at Migden, destitute, sick, dying. Can I sit down and enjoy your bright fireside, your Christmas cheer and welcome, while the snow drips upon her miserable bed, and starving children call in vain for food?" "Then you would take a basket of necessities—" "By your permission, yes; I would bring Christmas to this dreary home. But if you do not feel at liberty to aid me—" "Elinor!" The voice was Margaret's, and she spoke reproachfully. "Do you not know that the whole house is at your service?" said the host. "You are indeed kind; and the cook may pack—" "Yes, no,—I will do it myself," said Margaret, "and what is more, go with you to feed the bairns! If this had only happened one night later, we could have given them some roast beef and pudding." "Which would have done them a world of harm," said William. But Margaret was already in the larder, preparing baskets of bread, meat, and fuel. Elinor dressed at once, and then sat by the window, watching anxiously. After a long, long hour, the boy came back alone. The doctor was "keeping Christmas" miles away, and his assistant, also keeping Christmas, had simply paused in his amusements long enough to prepare a medicine. Everything had been done that could be done, and Doctor F—had been there twice that day. "But she was never in such pain before," explained the boy, half sobbing, and she was calling out for him dreadfully." "Perhaps she wants food," said Mr. Harper, kindly. "These ladies will go home with you, and see what can be done." The boy's face brightened. "You'll come, too," he said. "It's a rough place, you know for the like of them." "Yes, I shall come to protect them, certainly. Now Miss Grey, Mrs. Harper, are you ready?" Had Mr. Harper forgotten the Cochins Chinas? It was a glorious though stormy night, and as they battled with the wind together, half-staggering now and then, for each one bore some burden, even the unbelieving housemaid and carpenters—who had been dragged from the fireside to carry baskets—became amiable, and

looked with a more favourable eye upon the low huts towards which they hastened. Migden, what a place it was! Old houses almost tottering to their fall; wild faces peering out to see who passed; loud noises issuing from public-house and beer-shop; and here and there a long low moan of pain. And this was Christmas Eve—that joyful season; and, but an hour ago, some of them had sat down before a table loaded with rich dainties, nor given one thought to all this misery! "Bread." The cry was one of passionate entreaty. The mother answered by a long, deep sigh. Margaret Harper stayed to hear no more; while Elinor made her way to the sick bed, she opened her great basket. They were starving. If ever a man stood conscience-stricken before God, Mr. Harper so stood that night. To see those children devour Margaret's provision; to see the mother, rough and untrained as she was, smile, amidst all her agony, because the little ones were comforted; to watch the all-unconscious Elinor, as, with a sister's tenderness, she ministered to one of the "vulgar" girls of Migden; to mark how the three women, by the aid of fuel and blankets, soon made the room a brighter, warmer place,—all this was to learn that he had been wrong, ungrateful, selfish, and to resolve, in God's strength, to amend. It was a happy time for all the group—the brightest Christmas Eve imaginable; for Elinor discovered the sick girl only wanted nourishment, and, by judiciously supplying it, excited the wonder and gratitude of the whole family; while Margaret and husband, having despatched Susan and the men for fresh supplies of blankets, logs, and coals, kept up the fire with indefatigable zeal, and at last made beds for the little ones within sight of its blaze. William's watch pointed to eleven before they took their departure from the cottage, but they were sorry to go, even then. At Elinor's request, Mr. Harper had read a chapter to them all; and they left the poor mother watching, with a Bible in her hand, beside the sleeping children. Fresh snow had fallen, every cloud was gone, and the moon shone upon them bright and clear. There was, however, no need of outward beauty to rejoice their hearts that night; for they had been the means of saving life, of comforting nine weary, anxious hearts, of bringing Christmas to a Migden home; and they were full of gratitude to God. Next morning, Margaret was up betimes. She was determined to be very judicious; but none must starve at Migden on Christmas-day. With all her love of fun, she was a thoughtful housekeeper; and there was no lack of stores. It was a busy day, but ah, so happy! With the aid of the widow's son, the ladies found their way to all the most deserving families, and left a dinner of some sort everywhere. Perhaps too, here and there, some people not quite deserving were assisted; if so, it must have been Mr. Harper's fault, for he went about all day repeating the same text— "He is kind to the unthankful and the evil." Evening had come; and the two carpenters were, as they said, "alive;" as were also the three servants, Mr. and Mrs. Harper, Elinor, and the attorney's widow, who, her deafness notwithstanding, could slice up cake as fast as anybody! Forty-nine Migden children had been invited to see the panorama, and how they were to be seated was a mystery. It was arranged at last. Every stool, bench, and plank was hunted up; the "piccolo" was brought down from the drawing-room, that Elinor might give appropriate music; a grand supply of sugar-plums and cake was heaped on shelf and side-board; the doors were opened, and the "company" rushed in. Ye, rushed; for they were none of your civilized ones, those boys and girls from Migden! And though, according to order, they had "cleaned" for the occasion, they had not put on manners when they donned the scarce-dried garments which, to their own astonishment, their mothers had "washed up." But nobody found fault with their disorder; and Margaret having taken the boys, and Mrs. Brown the girls, under special charge, the host rang a great bell, and called for silence. Then curtains were drawn back, and lights extinguished; and amidst soft, low music, such as not one of the forty-nine had ever heard or cared to dream of hearing, a vision of a pale moon shining down on snow, and leafless trees and frozen streams, fixed wandering eyes, and brought the flush of pleasure to young brows that, all too soon, had learned to lower and darken. The music ceased, and Mr. Harper spoke. His sayings were very few and very simple, but, by God's blessing, they did good that night. And as, at each new scene, he sought with increased earnestness to blend instruction with the night's amusement, many a face showed signs of strong emotion, many a young heart echoed his stirring words. It was the dawn of a new day for Migden. The forty-nine were at once formed into a school that was, after a while, to be "ragged" in name alone; the women were won over by true kindness to their children; the men soon felt the influence of brighter homes; a Bible was in almost every house, the love of Jesus Christ in many hearts. Nor was it Migden only that was blessed; in teaching others, William Harper and his wife learned many a holy truth; in speaking of God's wondrous love in Christ, they learned to feel its power, and do its bidding; henceforth they lived not to themselves, but to Him. All the year round was Christmas after that; for no day passed in which they failed to offer thanks to God, that, from the manger at Bethlehem to the rugged cross on Calvary, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, had slowly passed for them.