

Teachers' Department.

Sabbath School Scripture Lessons.

DECEMBER 9th, 1860.

Read—JOHN xx. 1-18: Visit to the sepulchre. 1 KINGS xii. 1-15: The people's complaint to Rehoboam.

Recite—JOHN xix. 25-29.

DECEMBER 16th, 1860.

Read—JOHN xx. 19-31: Jesus appears to his disciples. 1 KINGS xii. 16-33: Jeroboam made King of Israel.

Recite—JOHN xx. 1-2.

MESSENGER ALMANAC.

From December 2nd to December 15th, 1860.

Table with columns for Day, SUN., MOON., and High Water at Halifax and Windsor. Rows include dates from Dec 2nd to 15th with times for sunrise, sets, and high water.

* For the time of HIGH WATER at Pictou, Pugwash, Wallace, and Yarmouth add 2 hours to the time at Halifax. * For HIGH WATER at Annapolis, Digby, &c. and St. John, N. B., add 3 hours to the time at Halifax.

Captain Ball's Experience.

A STORY FOR THIEVES IN THE CHURCH.

I was at work one afternoon in my garden, when a visitor entered, and approached so silently that he stood within a few feet of me before I was aware of his presence.

"You appear to be very busy this afternoon," he said, calling my name.

I looked up, and was not a little astonished to see standing before me, with an embarrassed air, one of the most worldly-minded and irreverent characters in the village.

"Yes, Capt. Ball," I answered; "I was giving these young pea-vines something to climb upon."

"And very busy thinking, also?"

"Yes, neighbour; I was thinking how much we are like these pea-vines. How much we need something to climb upon. A Spiritual Staff to lift us above the tangle of worldliness."

"Mr. Ransford," said the visitor, in a choked voice, "I—I am—trying to find such a staff!"

"My brother!" I exclaimed, full of sympathy and joy, "there is but one Staff; that Christ planted for us. We may all rest upon Him as a pillar of support, and love, and truth. You have not far to seek—you have only to reach out the tendrils of your heart in aspiration and faith, and they will clasp it. The command is, 'Repent and believe.'"

He was a middle-aged man, whose hair had grown early gray with worldly cares; whose eyes were unaccustomed to tears, and it was affecting to see that hard face soften and melt at last almost to weeping as he grasped my hand.

"I have had a strange experience," he said, recovering himself, but still speaking with much emotion. "It began about three weeks ago. I had lately been making some very good trades, and one night as I was walking home, reckoning up my gains, and feeling a pride and triumph in the start I had got in the world by my own shrewdness and exertions;—it was starlight, and very still, I could scarcely hear a noise but the field crickets, and the tramp of my horse on the dark road;—when suddenly a voice said, 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

"Was it actually a voice?" I questioned, as he hesitated.

"No; I knew it wasn't at the time. It was, I have no doubt, my own mind. But the expression was just as distinct and as unexpected as if it had been spoken by some person in my ear. The words I probably learned when I was a child, but had forgotten them, and I had to look in the Bible afterwards to see if they were there. I found them, and found a good many things besides, which seemed to have been intended expressly for me,—to break up entirely my way of life, and trouble all my calculations. The thing has been working in me ever since, and I can't stop its working. I have come to the conclusion that I must be a different man, and live

for a different purpose; and I have come to talk with you about it."

Having commenced giving the captain's story as he related it, I shall continue it in his own words, as well as I can remember them. The reader, however, must imagine several weeks to have elapsed since my first conversation with him, and the scene to be changed now to an evening meeting, where the captain, after a long struggle with himself, got up to relate his experience.

"I went to talk with the minister," he continued, after having astonished many others as much as he had me, with the repetition of the above narration, "I wanted to get into the church, were I thought I should be safe. I had no conception of repentance and a change of heart. I supposed our pastor would commence questioning me about doctrines, and so forth, to let me know what I would have to understand and believe before I could become a church-member. But he didn't take any such course. He made me go into the house, and sit down in his study, where he talked with me a long time about the blessedness of religion, and its value above all other things of this world, independently of its rewards hereafter. Then he said,

"Capt. Ball, do you know the first thing requisite to be done, if you would be a Christian?"

"I did not know."

"The Christian life—the life of a faithful follower of Jesus Christ—said he, 'can be founded only upon repentance. Now it is easy to say we repent of sins, and even to think we repent, but the only repentance that is worth anything is an active repentance—by which I mean not only sorrow for sin, and an earnest desire to avoid it in the future—but one that goes to work, and seek as far as it is in its power, to make amends for every wrong we have ever done. Is there a

person in the world, Capt. Ball, who can look you in the face, and say you have wronged him?"

"He knew my weak point," added the captain. "Every man has his weak point, and I suppose the lancet must be applied there first. That question was like sharp-searching steel driven into my soul. I writhed and groaned inwardly, and struggled and perspired a long time before I could answer.—I saw it was going to be dreadful hard for me to be a Christian. I meant, however, to get off as easily as I could. So I determined to confess something which I supposed was known to everybody who knows me—my horse-trade with Peter Simons, last spring.

"Did you wrong Peter?" said the minister.

"I shaved him a little," said I.

"How much?" said he. Tell me honestly what you think."

"I let him have a ring-bone and wind-broken nag that I had physicked up to look pretty gay, worth, for actual service, not over ten dollars, and got in return a sound and steady beast worth sixty dollars, and twenty-five dollars to boot. So I honestly think," said I, "that I shaved him out of about seventy-five dollars."

"And with seventy-five dollars in your possession belonging to poor Peter Simons, do you think you can commence a life of Christian purity? Do you think that Christ will hear your prayers for pardon, with stolen money in your pocket?" said the minister, "men must look out for themselves when they swap horses"—but he cut me short.

"Your own soul," said he, "will not admit the excuses which your selfishness invents."

"But the rule you apply," said I, "will cut off the heads of church-members as well as mine. There's Dea. Rich, he trades horses, and shaves when he can."

"No matter," said he, "whose head is cut off; no matter what Dea. Rich does. You have to deal with your own soul, and with your Lord. And I tell you, whether you are out of the church or in it, a single dollar which you have unjustly and knowingly taken from any man, without rendering him its full value to the best of your ability—a single dollar, I say, will be like a mill-stone hung upon your neck, to sink your soul into the sea of spiritual death!"

"I couldn't stand that. The Spirit of God used those words with terrible effect upon my heart. I was greatly agitated. The truth spoken by the pastor appealed to my understanding with irresistible power. I went away, but I couldn't rest. So I took seventy-five dollars, and went to Peter and paid him; making him promise not to tell anybody, for I was ashamed to have it known that I was conscience-stricken, and had paid back money. Then I went to the minister again, and told him what I had done. He didn't praise me, as I thought he would. He took it as a matter of course, and no more merit in me than it is to wash my hands before I sit down to supper. On the contrary, he seemed to suspect that my hands were not quite clean

yet. He wanted to know if I had wronged anybody else besides Peter. I tried to say no, but my conscience wouldn't let me. I could have told a plumper lie than that once, without flinching—yes, and flattered my own heart to believe the lie. I was discouraged. I felt bitterly disheartened. It was, indeed, so much harder being a Christian than I supposed, that I regretted going to talk with the minister at all. Like the young man who had great possessions, I was on the point of going away sorrowful. But my heart burned within me, and I was forced to speak.

"In the way of business," said I, "no doubt I have taken advantage here and there—as everybody does—as church-members themselves do, when they can."

"What everybody does is no rule for you and me, Capt. Ball," said the minister. "It is to be Christians in the fullest sense—not simply to be church-members—that we must strive with all our hearts.—The fact of being in the fold does not make the lamb; there are wolves in the fold, alas! but we are by no means justified in doing as the wolves do, even when they appear in sheep's clothing."

"I felt the rebuke. 'Well,' said I, 'there is Dea. Rich, I think he paid me a note twice. The first time he paid it, we were transacting other business, and by some mistake the note wasn't destroyed. I found it among my papers afterwards. I was a good deal excited, and lay awake more than one night thinking what I ought to do about it. The deacon was a hard man, I considered, and took advantage of people when he could. He had driven more than one hard bargain with me.'"

The deacon, who was present, and heard these allusions to himself, winced, and coughed uneasily. Capt. Ball went on, without appearing to mind him.

"So," said I to the minister, "I concluded I would serve the deacon as he would probably have served me under similar circumstances. I kept the note by me a good while, and when I thought the particulars of our settlement had slipped his mind, I said to him one day, 'may be he would like to take up that note which had been due then a considerable time. He was surprised—looked excited and angry—said he had paid it, and held out stoutly for a while; but there was the note. There was no proof that it had ever been paid, and finally he took out his pocket-book, and with some pretty hard words, paid it over again, with interest'."

"And now," said the minister, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I suppose," said I, "the money must be paid back."

"So I went to the deacon the next day, told him that on reflection, I was convinced that he was right and I was wrong about the first payment of the note, and returned him the money—one hundred and thirteen dollars—a good deal to his astonishment."

The deacon coughed, and wiped his forehead.

"I hoped then all was right," continued Capt. Ball. "I tried to satisfy my conscience that it was. But I was afraid to go back to the minister, he has such a way of stirring up the conscience, and finding mud at the bottom, when we flatter ourselves that because it is out of sight there is no impurity there. And I knew that as long as I dreaded to see the minister, something must be wrong; and on locking carefully into my heart, I found the little matter of a mortgage which I had foreclosed on a poor man, and got away his farm, when he had no suspicion but I would give him time to redeem it. By that means I had got into my possession property worth two thousand dollars, for which I did not actually pay, and for which Isaac Dorr never actually realized more than half that amount. But the proceeding was entirely legal, and so I tried to excuse myself. But my awakened conscience kept saying, 'You have taken a poor man's land without giving him a just return; the law of God condemns you, although the law of man sanctions the wrong. You shall have no peace of soul—your heart will burn you—until with justice you wipe out your own injustice to him and to all others whom you have wronged.'"

"Against the decree of my conscience I rebelled a long time. It was hard for me to raise a thousand dollars, together with the interest due from the time the mortgage was foreclosed; and it was like taking a portion of my life to be obliged to subtract so much money from my gains, and give it to a man who had no legal claim upon me. I groaned and mourned over it in secret, and tried to pray—but that mortgage came right up between my prayer and God, and heaven looked dark and frowning through it. At last I could not resist the appeals of conscience any longer, and I went again to the minister, told him my trouble, and asked him what I should do.

"There is a simple test," said he. "Do you love your neighbor as yourself! If you do, you will be just to him, if it takes from you the last dollar you have in the world."

"That was a terrible sentence. I went out staggering from it as if I had received a blow. 'O God!' I said, 'how can I be a Christian?' But I had help beyond myself, otherwise I could never have ended that struggle. I knelt before God and solemnly vowed, for His sake, for the sake of His pardon and love, I would not only do justly to the poor man I had wronged, but would give up, if need be, all I had in the world, so that I might find peace in Him. A strange, soothing influence came over my soul, and a voice seemed to say, 'Though you lose all you have, God and Christ, and the blessings of a heart pure and at peace, shall be left you—the best and only true source of happiness and life.' And in the solemn night-time, after I gave up the struggle, that comfort seemed to me so great and precious, that I felt willing, if it would only stay with me, to accept poverty, and go into the world poor and despised, hugging that priceless blessing in my heart. The next day I was light as if I had had wings. Nothing could keep me from going to see Isaac Dorr, with a couple of hundred dollars in my pocket, and a note for the remainder of what I owed him.

"Well," said the narrator, with tears running down his cheeks, "I only wish that every person here could have seen the Dorr family, when I visited them, and made known my errand. Poor Isaac had grown quite discouraged, and had just made up his mind to quit his wife and children, and go to California. His children were crying, and his wife was in an extremity of distress and despair. She received me a great deal better than I anticipated! I had acted according to law, she said, and Isaac, careless and improvident, was greatly to blame.

"Yes," said Isaac, with the firmness of a desperate man, "it was a savage game you played me, but I was a fool ever to get into debt as I did, and then fancy that any man would not take an advantage when the law permits it. I am ruined in consequence!—and here you see this woman and these babies!"

"The poor fellow broke down as he looked at them, and cried like a child.

"Isaac," said I, "as soon as I could speak, I have come to show you that a man can be honest even when the law doesn't compel him to be. I want to do right, Isaac, because God commands it, and I have come to tell you that you needn't leave your wife and babies yet, unless you prefer to."

"Prefer to—go off in a strange country and leave them here to suffer?" he cried, and he caught the children in his arms, and wrung his wife's hand, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

"Then I counted out the money I had brought, and explained what I intended to do, and gave him the note; and such surprise and happiness I never saw. They would all have kissed my feet if I would have let them. It seemed to me as if heaven was opened then and there—and it was opened in my own heart, with such a flood of light and joy as I had never experienced or thought possible before.

"My friends," added the captain, his once hard voice now almost as mellow as a woman's, his cheeks still moist with tears, "I have been constrained to make this confession; I thank you for listening to it. The minister tells me a man may be a church-member, and not a Christian. I mean to be a Christian first, and if I fail—"

He could proceed no further, but sat down with an emotion more effective than any words. I have nothing to add to his narrative, except that he became a church-member, and that his example of thorough repentance, of childlike faith in Christ, and of rigorous, practical, every day righteousness, elevated many degrees the standard of Christianity among my people.—W. & R.

Agriculture.

PURITUDITY IN WELLS.—Sometimes the water in wells suddenly acquires a putrid taste and smell, as though some animal matter was undergoing decay therein, yet which upon careful examination is found not to be the case. The Homestead tells of such an instance, and a remedy was found in the thorough agitation of the water, by working a chain pump for two hours, bringing the water more or less in contact with the air. The next day the water was as sweet as ever. In the case of a cistern of filtered rain water, the same remedy of agitation was resorted to with equal success.

FLOWERS FOR WINTER.—Flowers intended for winter blooming, need a season of repose, especially tropical plants, such as geranium, fuchsia, &c., which should be allowed rest from growth during the months of July and August, by almost entirely withdrawing the supply of water. Of course the leaves will fall off, but the plants will be fitted to start into fresh and vigorous growth, as soon as the water is again supplied. Previous to this, the branches of the fuchsia should be pruned in, and water given sparingly at first, increasing the supply, as the young shoots grow. Geraniums should be partially shaded from the sun after they are cut down, which should be as soon as their flowering season is over. Until they are re-potted into smaller pots, about the beginning of the month of September, very little water should be given them. Geranium cuttings may be put in at the time they are cut down. For this purpose, select the shortest and stockiest shoots with a growing point, and divest them of most of their leaves keep rather dry till they show symptoms of growth, and success is almost certain.—Dollar Newspaper.