

Youths' Department.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Sunday, June 14th, 1868.

Concert. Or Review of the past three months' lessons.

Sunday, June 21th, 1868.

MATTHEW IV. 18-22. MARK I. 16-20. LUKE V. 1-11. Call of Simon Peter and Andrew and of James and John with the miraculous draughts of fishes. Recite—MATTHEW X. 37-39.

Poor Matt: or, the Clouded Intellect.

BY JEAN INGELOW.

CHAPTER III.

Matt came back under the shelter of the boat, and lay down, and drew part of a sail over him, and fell into a sound sleep; perhaps he had slept little during the past night, and now that this gloom and terror were melted away in the sunshine of hope and peace, he could no longer sit waking under the cloudy sky.

The lady sat by him, partly sheltered also by the boat. She looked out over the purple sea, still troubled, heaving and bare, for not a boat rode at anchor near the dangerous rocky beach; not a vessel ventured near enough to be seen from its sandy reaches.

At length the clouds broke; it began to rain hard; and not without a great effort did she succeed in waking the boy. His opened his eyes at last with a smile. The pouring rain and the gloomy sky were nothing to him; the high but warm wind did not trouble him; his thoughts, whatever they may have been, could not be related to his benefactress; he was comforted, but he only showed it by his face and by his tranquil movements.

They reached the cottage. There was trouble and sorrow within; quite enough of both to account for the boy's having been left to wander out by himself on that stormy day. The poor old grandfather was worse; and Mary Goddard, the boy's aunt, came to the door, her eyes red and her face disfigured with weeping. The lady could not stay then; but in less than a week she came again and inquired after the old man.

'Ab, dear heart! it seems hard to lose poor father!' exclaimed Mary, when her visitor was seated, and had asked a sympathizing question as to the old man's health.

'Is he so very ill that there is no hope?' asked the lady.

'The doctor does not say,' replied the daughter, 'but when a man is past eighty what can one expect? Would you like to see him, ma'am?'

The visitor assented, and was taken up a ladder into a comfortable room in the roof.

The aged fisherman, with his rugged face and hard hands, lay helplessly on his clean bed; but his eyes were still bright, and his voice strong.

'Put a chair, Polly,' he said to his daughter. 'I take this kind, ma'am. Here I am, you see, a disabled old hulk. I have made a many voyages in my time, when I was in the king's service.' Here a fit of coughing forced him to stop.

'When he had ceased to cough, the visitor said, 'Yes, you have passed a busy life, my friend; and what a mercy it is that God gives you a few days of quiet and leisure at the end of it, to think of the last voyage,—the entrance, we may hope, into an eternal haven. Do you think of that last voyage? Do you pray to God to have mercy on you for Christ's sake, and grant you an entrance to that haven of rest?'

The old man assented reverently and heartily, and then said, 'Mary, the lady has never a chair; I told you to set the chair for her. A good daughter she has always been to me, ma'am! Her poor mother died when I was in the *Atalante*, Captain Hickey; you've heard of him, ma'am? The discipline he maintained! He was the finest captain in the service.'

'I never heard of him,' replied the visitor.

'He lost his ship in a sea fog off Halifax harbor. He had despatches aboard, and he made up his mind they should be delivered. He fired a fog-signal gun in hopes it would be answered from the lighthouse on Cape Sambre, but by a sad mischance it happened that the *Barossa*, that was likewise lost in this fog, answered it; and the unfortunate *Atalante* was steered according to that gun. She struck; and in less than a quarter of an hour we was all out of her, every officer, man, and boy, many on us not half clothed; and there wasn't a mast, nor a beam; nor a bit of broken spar, to be seen of her. She filled and heeled over; and almost before we could cut the pinnace from the boom, she parted in two between the main and mizen masts, and the swell sucked her in, guns, and stores, and all.'

'That must have been an awful scene,' observed the visitor. 'It is a great mercy that you were preserved in such a danger. Shall I read you a chapter in the Bible, now I am here?'

'I should take it kind if you would ma'am, very kind indeed; for Mr. Green said he would not be able to come to-day, and my daughter has no time. I could spell a bit over myself, but my eyes fail, and I feel strange and weak. There was a time when I could "hand, reef, and steer" with the best of them. I was rated "able seaman" in the *Atalante*, and for

upwards of two years I was "captain of the fore-top."

The visitor sat down and read several chapters. The old man listened with pleasure; his face, seamed and brown with long exposure to the weather, showed no pallor, but there was a look about his eyes that told of a great change,—they were dim, and sometimes wandering.

'I take this visit very kind of you,' he repeated, when she had done; 'and I like what you read, it did me good; and ma'am, I'm much obliged to you, and thank you kindly for being so good to my poor boy.'

'How do you think he seems, ma'am?' asked Mary Goddard, when they came down together.

'I think he is very much altered, Mary. He does not look to me as if he would live many days.'

'Ab, dear heart! said the daughter, 'I was afraid you would say so; and though he be so old, it seems hard to lose him; for a cheerfuller and bonester man never walked this world!'

'He seems in a thankful frame of mind now, Mary, and was very attentive while I was reading.'

'O yes, he is always pleased with whatever I do for him, and says it is a great mercy he has time to think of his end; he is vastly pleased now when Mr. Green comes to talk with him, though at first he did not seem to care for it.'

The visitor went away. The rain came down all that night and the next day. On the third day she went again to the old fisherman's cottage, and found the old chintz curtain drawn across the window in token of mourning. A neighbor came out of the next cottage and told her that the old man had died that morning at daybreak, and that his daughter had walked over to a village some miles inland to tell her brother and his wife.

'Was the old man sensible to the last?' asked the lady.

'As sensible as you are now, ma'am; and often seemed to me to be praying. Would you like to see Matt, ma'am? he is in my house.'

'Yes, I wish to see him. What does he know about his grandfather?'

'Why, ma'am, when his aunt woke him and dressed him this morning, she told him that he would not see his grandfather any more, for that God had sent to fetch him.'

'He was not frightened, I hope?'

'O no, ma'am—pleased, wonderfully pleased, and said he wanted to go too. He is a very strange child.'

'Very strange, indeed! but in some respects I wish we were more like him.'

When Matt saw his friend, it reminded him of the great news about his grandfather; and he told her that God had sent for him, adding, 'Matt wants to go too.'

'Matt shall go some day,' she answered, soothingly.

'Matt wants to go now,' replied the boy.

His friend took him out on to the sands, and sat down with him. She tried to explain that some day God would certainly send for him; for she could only convey to him the notion of a change of place, not of death. When Matt was once convinced that he should be sent for some day, he was very urgent to know what day; and when, after a great deal of trouble, his friend made him understand that she did not know what day, but that it might be any day, he sat long silent on the sand as if pondering, and then got up and began to move towards the cottage.

'What does Matt want?' asked his friend. The boy looked at his hands, and replied with calm and touching simplicity, 'Matt must have his hands washed.' Why? the lady wondered why; but she said nothing—she only rose and followed him. He had found the woman of the house when she entered, the mother of little Becca, and was explaining to her that his hands must be washed; that God would send for Matt some day, perhaps it would be that day, and that Matt must be ready.

The woman no sooner understood what he meant than she sat down, threw her apron over her head, and began to cry bitterly; but little Becca was willing to indulge the boy's fancy; she, accordingly, fetched some water and some soap, and carefully washed his hands. But that done, he yet stood still, as if expecting something more, till she asked him what he wanted; then he answered, with a kind of glad but solemn expectancy, 'Matt must have his new cap on—Matt wants his fur cap.'

'No, Matt must not have his best cap,' answered the child, 'except on Sundays to go to church in.' But Matt entreated in his piteous way, and the tears rolled down his cheeks, till at last the lady begged that his new cap might be fetched; and when it appeared he was contented, and went gently out at the door, and looked up between the clouds, softly repeating that God would send for Matt some day; perhaps it would be to-day, and Matt must be ready—Matt must always be ready.

His poor aunt should have managed better, said Becca's mother, who had followed them out of doors; 'she might have known if she said God had sent for his grandfather that Matt would take her exactly at her word. However, it's of no use trying to explain it to him; and least of all trying to make out that it was not that but something different. The boy must not be contradicted; that would only confuse him more; but,' she added, 'it does seem a gloomy thing that he should always be expecting his death, and always keeping himself ready for it.'

'Does it seem a gloomy thing?' asked the lady.

'Why, yes, ma'am, I'm sure it would quite mope me to be so frequently thinking about death.'

'Not if you felt that you were ready, and were always desirous to keep yourself ready.'

'But why should one, ma'am,' answered the woman, thoughtlessly, 'so long before the time?'

'Ah, Mrs. Letts, we cannot tell that it is long before the time. Are we not told, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh?"'

'Yes, ma'am; and Mr. Green a very little time ago preached a discourse on that text, a very beautiful discourse it was; but I never thought people had to get ready for death just as they get ready for paying their rent, or, as one may say, to lay up wood to be ready for the winter.'

'Why not? Must we not all die, as surely as we must pay our rent? Is not death as certain to come as winter?'

'Yes, sure, ma'am.'

'Then the only difference in our preparing should be, that death being more important than those other things which you mentioned, we should prepare for it much more earnestly, seriously, and constantly.'

'Yes, ma'am, that's what I meant. We should prepare at proper solemn times, on Sundays, when we have time to think of these solemn things, and not be mixing it up with our work every day.'

'Mrs. Letts, if you had earned no money as yet to pay your rent, and knew it must be paid on a certain day, should you say to yourself, "This is a very serious matter; I must not think of it now that I am busy with my work, I must wait till I have a quiet hour; for it is a very important thing, and not to be thought of excepting at particular times?"'

'Why, no, ma'am; of course I should think of it early and late! Well, ma'am, perhaps you are right; in short, I am sure you are; but it is not very easy for poor folks to think about religion and death, as much as those who have nothing to do. However, poor Matt has few enough things to think about, and if it pleases him to think of being fetched to a better world, why, let him do it.'

'O yes, let him do it,' replied Matt's friend; 'I believe he is ready whenever it may please the Almighty to summon him; and the time may not be so long that he will become impatient.'

'I'm sure a long life is not to be desired for him,' observed the woman; 'for he suffers a great deal in the cold weather.' So saying, she brought the boy into her cottage, and the lady took her leave.

The sun was shining pleasantly across the level sands as she walked homewards, and each cliff cast a clear reflection of its figure at her feet, the soft and shining waves broke gently on the shore, and the sky was peaceful and cloudless, only a flock of white gulls were wheeling about in it, serving thus to increase its resemblance to its 'twin deep,' the blue sea, that was adorned, not far from the horizon, with a fleet of small fishing vessels, whose white sails were lovely in the sunshine.

The lady walked till she came to a large cave in the cliff, about half a mile from the old fisherman's cottage: here she had sometimes sat with Matt, teaching him his plaiting; and here she now entered and sat down to rest after her long walk.

It was a strange place, more a cleft in the rock than an ordinary cave, for it narrowed up above to a mere crack, which crack was strangely and beautifully festooned with hanging ferns of the brightest green; for they were constantly kept moist by the drops of water that filtered through the stone.

The sun now long enough to shine into the dark cavern and make it warm and cheerful, and to show with clear distinctness the limpets that stuck to the rocks which here and there protruded from the soft sand which floored it, and the little pools of sea-water that lay about in stony basins. These basins were rugged, and covered without with green weeds, and within fringed with red and brown dulse and seaweeds, and the tiny little fish were impatiently swimming about in them, and small crabs of the hermit tribe were dragging their bright shell houses along the slippery margins.

She sat down beside one of these little rocky reservoirs and enjoyed the sunshine and shelter, thinking, meanwhile, how she could further help and teach the poor child who had now so large a share of her sympathy. She decided that it was as well he should be out of the way of his relations on the day of the funeral, both for their sake and his own; and she accordingly resolved to ascertain when it was to take place, and bring him there to sit with her till it should be over.

Accordingly, she made her appearance at the cottage on the morning of the funeral, and took away the boy.

She found him still 'ready,' still prepared and expectant, still occupied with the belief that God would fetch him, and that perhaps it might be 'to-day.'

She took him to the cave, that he might not see the mournful cavalcade proceed from the cottage poor; and when he was tired of plaiting straw and of looking at the little imprisoned fishes swimming about in their brown basins of rock, she opened her basket and gave him a nice dinner, such as she knew he would like.

Matt was very happy; and when he had done eating, he sat basking in the entrance of the cavern, pleased with watching the numerous rock-pigeons that flew about among the cliffs and brushed past with their opalized wings and glossy necks, to peck at the seed-corn which his friend threw out to them.

He made her wash his hands when he had finished his meal, and he had put on his cap, his best cap, and was sitting ready. In spite of all his amusement in watching the blue pigeons, he was still ready, still conscious of an expected summons; and when the last grain of corn had been carried up to the young birds in the nest,

and all the sand was imprinted with the feet of the pretty parents, he withdrew his eyes from the place where they had fluttered and striven, and fixed them once more on the open heavens.

'Is Matt sorry that his grandfather is gone?' asked his friend.

Matt answered, 'No; and said he wanted to go too; and then in his imperfect way, partly in words and partly by signs, he inquired what kind of a place it was where God lives.'

'It was never cold,' she replied; 'always warm and pleasant. Matt would never cry when he got there.'

'Would nobody beat Matt there?' asked the child, wistfully; 'wouldn't Rob beat him?'

'No; when Matt went to be with God; nobody would beat him any more.'

A gleam of joy stole over the boy's face as he sat pondering over these good tidings; then, with a sorrowful sigh, he said, 'Rob often beats Matt now.' But at that moment the soft sound of a tolling bell was heard in the cave, and he turned his head to listen. It was the bell for his grandfather's funeral; and it was touching to see him amused and pleased with it, unconscious what it portended.

They staid a long time in the cave: the boy being amused and diverted by the various things his friend found for him to look at, and by a grotto that she had made for him with loose scollop shells; but in the midst of his pleasure that gleam of joy would often return to his face, and he would exultingly repeat that 'some day he should go to God, and nobody should beat him any more.'

At last, when the sound of the bell had long ceased, and the sun was shining full in at the mouth of the cavern, his friend took him home again; and finding the mourners already returned, left him with them, and took her leave—little thinking, as she walked across the cliffs to her residence, that in this life she was to behold him no more.

To be continued.

Be Courteous.

'You had better mend your ways, and go to church,' said one citizen to another, whom he met one Sabbath morning.

'What matter is it of yours?' was the curt reply, with a resolve not to be scolded into the church.

Soon after the tones of Mr. Jordan accosted him: 'What a beautiful morning! so pleasant, I thought I must get out to church to hear Dr. Charon—did you ever hear him? They say he is a fine speaker; suppose you go with me.'

'I have no seat,' was the reply.

'Plenty of room in mine. Come.' The man hesitated, but could not resist the politeness; and he went, not only that Sabbath, but he became a constant attendant upon the house of God, and that day was the beginning of "better things" for himself and his household.

HOW TO WORK FOR CHRIST.—A clergyman observing a poor man by the road breaking stones with a pickaxe, and kneeling, to get at his work better, made the remark, "Ah, John, I wish I could break the stony hearts of my hearers as easily as you are breaking those stones." The man replied, "Perhaps, master, you do not work on your knees."

'Why do you show favor to your enemies instead of destroying them?' said a chieftain to the Emperor Sigismund. "Do I not destroy my enemies by making them my friends?" was the Emperor's noble reply. Kindness is the best weapon with which to beat an adversary.

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