

Boys' Department.

BIBLE 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.

Sunday, June 28th, 1868.

MATTHEW VIII. 14-17: MARK I. 21-28: LUKE IV. 29-34: LUKE IV. 31-37: IV. 38-41: The healing of a demoniac in the Synagogue. The healing of Peter's wife's mother and many others. Recite—ISAIAH LIII. 4-6.

Poor Matt: or, the Clouded Intellect.

BY JEAN INGELOW.

CHAPTER VI.

Concluded.

Matt got up the next morning, and felt for the first time the difference made in the cottage by the absence of his grandfather. Every change affected his imperfect mind, and made him restless. He was curious to know why his grandfather had not taken his oars and his fishing-tackle with him; and when his aunt told him there was no sea where he was gone, the boy was at first greatly surprised, and then said it must be a very good place, 'No sea, no storms.'

'Ay,' said his aunt, 'no high winds such as frighten Matt in the winter.' So the boy was satisfied for the present, and went out to the beach to wait for his friend, but she did not come; and after a while her absence and that of his grandfather made Matt restless and uneasy.

Becca was sure she would come; and the lady had said she would come; and, accordingly, the careful little girl led Matt to the cavern; and then the sight of the grotto and the place where they had sat the day before, reminded the poor boy of the conversation held there, and a while he was contented; but the lady did not come that day, nor for many days; and at last, though Matt went to the cave every day to look for her, he scarcely expected to find her, though always satisfied with little Becca's assurance that she would 'be sure to come to-morrow.'

At length, wondering at her protracted absence, Mary Goddard walked to the little watering-place where she had been staying; and then the people of the house told her that their lodger was gone. She had been sent for suddenly the same night that the old fisherman was buried. A near relation, living more than fifty miles away, was taken extremely ill, likely to die, and he had sent for her. The woman added, when she saw Mary Goddard's look of disappointment, 'but she has left what ought to reconcile you to losing her; she is a good friend of the boy's, certainly. She told me to give you this the first time I saw you; and if I had not been so busy you should have had it before, for I would have walked over with it.' So saying, she put into Mary Goddard's hand a sovereign; and very gratefully was it received: for the expenses of the old fisherman's illness and funeral had pressed heavily on his industrious daughter, and she now hardly knew how she could earn enough money to maintain herself and the boy.

Poor Matt! when his aunt came home she did not conceal from him the truth that he had lost his friend, but told him abruptly that she was gone, and was not coming back any more.

He did not take the news so well as she had expected; for though he said little at the time, he evidently pined and moped after 'his lady,' and it seemed as if in departing she had taken all the sunshine with her; for no sooner was she gone than the sweet warm days of October gave way to a succession of raw, boisterous weather, when the foam from the rough troubled sea was blown into the cottage door, and when the gusty winds shook the frail little tenement, waving its ineffectual curtains, blowing its smoke down the chimney, and making it difficult to keep the candle lighted on the table.

Matt could only sit and shiver. His pale hands, cramped with cold, forgot the art that had beguiled so many listless hours; his feeble feet, chilled and benumbed, could no longer support him to the sands; his mysterious searchings of the heavens took place no more. He sat from day to day asking for 'his lady'; sometimes crying with the cold, and sometimes from a sharper evil; for the lonely child was often left with the neighbor's boy, Rob, whom he so much dreaded; and then, when he peevishly cried, he was beaten. But he seldom had sense to tell this to his aunt when she returned, though sometimes he made her wonder at the fervency with which he would repeat, 'Matt shall go to God some day, and Matt shall never be beaten any more.'

She did not understand half the significance of those words. She was obliged often to go out washing and charring; and during her absence this Rob was most frequently left with Matt; and at her return received a penny for having given him his dinner and taken care of him. Sometimes Becca had this charge instead of Rob, and then the day went cheerily. If the sun shone, Becca would lead him, sadly lame and helpless now, to the cave; and there the two children would talk together on the one subject that Matt could understand; and every day came the never-wearing assurance, that when Matt went to God he should never be

cold, and he should never be beaten any more.

And now came a time of great trouble and distress to the inhabitants of the little fishing hamlet. There was very bad weather; the men could not go out with the boats, and unwholesome food and over-hard work brought the fever, and Becca's mother and poor Mary Goddard both sickened at the same time. The neighbors in the two other cottages did what they could for them; and Rob's mother, a kind-hearted, bustling woman, who had many children of her own to attend to, and a sickly, bedridden mother to nurse, constantly came in to keep Mary's fire, and to give her drink and make her bed for her. Many a time did this poor creature spare a crust for the poor idiot boy from her own miserable store; for she had compassion on his helplessness, and could not bear to see his blue lips and trembling limbs, as he sat on his little wooden stool by the small fire, within hearing of his aunt's delirious moaning.

The weather grew colder and colder, till the very sea-water was half solid with spongy ice, and broke crisply on the frozen shore; the north wind howled in the rents and crevices of the lofty cliffs; and the poverty of the hamlet was so great that there was little fire inside to keep its force from being felt. The fishermen said the fever would surely be starved out soon; but it seized on Rob's father next; and the same day that he sickened, the doctor said Mary Goddard was past hope. Mary Goddard had lived alone with the poor boy almost ever since her father's death; for her sister had taken a service, and gone with her master's family to London, and the married brother and his wife did not act a friendly part by her.

Mr. Green was frequently in and out of the cottages during this time of disaster, but he could not effectually relieve the distress; it was too deep and complete. The poor people had been improvident in their times of prosperity, and now all their misfortunes seemed to have come at once—fearfully cold weather, illness, and a bad fishing season.

He walked down to the little hamlet about an hour after the doctor had paid his visit. There was now one person ill in each of the four cottages; but cold as it was, smoke was only rising from the chimney of one. He opened Mary Goddard's door; she, unconscious of the cold, lay quietly on her bed, her bright eyes open and glazed with the glitter of approaching death; little Becca stood over her, fanning her, and feebly crying from sheer hunger and fatigue. And Matt sat by the empty grate, too much over-powered with cold to observe his presence.

'My poor child,' he asked of Becca, 'is there no fire wood?'

Becca shook her head, and sobbed out, that the doctor had said 'it was of no consequence; the cold could not hurt Mary now.'

'No, she will die; but don't cry so my dear; she was a good woman, and I believe God will take her to himself. Is there nobody to attend on her but you?'

'Mother's too weak to come out yet,' said the poor little girl; 'and father, he came in, and he said I was to stop, and be sure and not to leave her till he came back; but I'm so frightened, and Matt and me, we haven't had anything to eat.'

'Well, I have brought something that you and Matt shall have; here, open my basket, and sit down by Matt, and eat while I fan poor Mary.'

Little Becca did as she was bidden; and she and Matt tasted food for the first time that day. In the mean time Rob's mother came in; and seeing Mary's state, went away, and presently returned with her grown-up daughter.

'It is not much that can be done for her now, poor soul,' she remarked to the clergyman; 'but she must not be left alone, and my husband being a trifle better this morning, I can leave him for a while.'

Matt and Becca were then sent out of the cottage to Becca's house; and there, a bright fire being alight on the hearth, the boy revived, and little Becca had an hour or two of quiet rest.

Becca's mother was getting better; but she was still lying in her bed up stairs, with one of her daughters attending on her. It was now snowing hard, but the wind had somewhat abated, and the sea was calmer than it had been for some days.

Accordingly, the fishermen were preparing to go out in their boats, and everything looked more cheerful than usual; the hope of some thing being earned revived the spirits of the women; and the men, once occupied, forgot their gloomy fears of the fever.

The two children, thus left alone, sat quietly by the fire; Matt, cowering over the bright flames, recovered his spirits, and began to crow the same inarticulate song that he had often sung when he was comfortable and had eaten a good dinner. And Becca, who had been roused before daybreak to wait on her mother, and then to go to Mary Goddard, fell quietly as sleep before the fire, after watching the thickly-falling flakes of snow.

The little girl, when questioned afterwards, said that she thought she might have slept an hour, when awaking she found the fire slowly gone out, and Matt earnestly gazing out of the window. The snow was falling faster than ever, and the tide rapidly coming in washed it away at the edge of the waves as fast as it reached the ground. Matt had been told that morning that God would soon send for his aunt also, but at the time he took little notice, his always torpid faculties being rendered more than ever dull by the cold; but now the warmth of the cottage had done him good, and as Becca mended the fire, he inquired whether his aunt was gone.

Becca did not know. The boy, still gazing upwards, said he wanted to go out of doors,

and ask the great to God take him too; Matt wanted to go away. Becca tried to calm him; but he was urgent in his desire to go out, and at last she was obliged to lock the door. Matt upon this wept, and begged to be allowed to go out. 'Would God never send for poor Matt?' he piteously inquired. 'Would not God send for Matt, if Matt begged him very hard?' Matt did not wish to stay if his aunt was going away.

Becca could say nothing to all this; but in the midst of her attempts to quiet the boy, some one tried the door, and she opened it. It was Rob's mother; she was come to tell Becca that she must go into the town to fetch a nurse; and when she had given the message, she turned to Matt, and gently and slowly told him that his aunt was gone.

Matt said nothing; he was looking at the flakes of snow as they fell from the gloomy heaven so thickly, and were whirled about by the winds, and heaved against the frozen threshold, or swallowed up in the gloomy sea.

'Matt, your poor aunt is gone to God,' said the woman kindly, and she brought him near to the fire and chafed his cold hands; then, having left a good fire, she went away with little Becca, charging her boy, whom she left behind, to stay with Matt, and be good to him.

Poor Matt! some dreamy hours passed between him and his rough guardian; but we do not know how they passed; we only know that the snow fell faster than ever, and the wind roared in the chimney, and the waves rose and thundered upon the dreary beach; and that when after several hours the brief winter day began to close, and poor little Becca came in again, tired and almost exhausted with the force of the wind, Matt had evidently been crying very bitterly, and Becca felt very sure that Rob had beaten him.

Rob, as soon as Becca came in, got up, and said he supposed he need not stay there any more. If it had not been for his mother's telling him to stop with Matt, he might have gone out with his father in the boat, he said; and he now left the cottage in a very surly humor.

Becca crept up stairs to hear how her mother was, and saw her lying still, and evidently better; her sister, who was exhausted with many nights of watching, was sound asleep at the foot of the bed, and she and her patient had both slept through all the noise of the storm and of Matt's crying. Becca's mother woke as the child entered, and asked for a drink of cold tea, telling Becca to step quietly that she might not wake her sister. The little girl held the cup to her mother's lips; the fever had subsided, but the poor woman was very weak; and when a rush-candle had been lighted, and her medicine given to her, she said she wished to be left alone again that she might sleep.

So Becca went down and gave Matt his supper, and ate her own. It was now quite dark, and Becca strained her eyes in looking out to sea to try and discover whether the boats were coming home. The children had no candle, and the fire gave but little light; so Becca sat down and Matt beside her; and the little girl was so weary that at length she sunk on the floor, gathered the thin cloak about her that she had worn on her walk to the town, and fell into a weary sleep.

A glowing log, in its fall upon the hearth, suddenly roused her after a short slumber, and she started up. Matt was still sitting beside her, but frightened and trembling, for the noise of the wind and waves was fearful. She tried to cheer the poor boy, but he would not be comforted; and every time a louder gust than usual shook the cottage, he would start up and hurry to the door, trying to lock, and begging that he might go out 'and talk to God.' Becca gave him another piece of bread, and brought him back to the fire; but at length finding that he could not rest, and feeling sure that the door was securely bolted, she lay down again and sunk into a deep sleep, forgetting her troubles and fatigue, and dreaming that the wind went down, and that she saw her father stepping ashore from the boat, and telling her he had brought in a fine haul of mackerel.

From hour to hour the child slept on; and the roaring winds moaned without, and the clouds raced across the dreary heavens, and the desolate sea was rough with foam, and the snow fell and fell, and the wind blew it away from the cliffs, and swept it into the tumbling waves. But poor little Becca did not dream of any of these things; she slept sweetly in the warmth and glow of the drift-wood fire, with her little weary head upon a furled-up sail, which she was reclining on by way of a pillow; and she dreamed that she and Matt were walking in a field, a large field full of yellow buttercups, that the sun was shining pleasantly, and she was gathering handfuls of the buttercups for Matt to play with.

It was a very pretty field, she thought; and even in her dream she knew that she had been sadly tired, and that sitting in this quiet field was a very welcome rest.

'What a long, sweet dream that was—the sweetest, perhaps, that little Becca had ever known, because it came after such great sorrow and such long wakefulness. At last, in the very dead of the night, she awoke, and the embers were just dying out on the hearth, and the room above was very still, and through the uncurtained casement the large white moon was shining above the edge of a black cloud; it shone upon the brick floor and upon the little stool upon which Matt had been sitting, but Matt was not there! Becca was alone.

The little girl started up in a fright. Who could have taken Matt away? No one; for she remembered that she had bolted the door. She slipped off her shoes and stole softly up the stairs to see if he might have found his way to her mother's chamber. No—he was not to be seen; her mother and sister were soundly sleeping, and

the dim rush-candle was giving light enough to show that no Matt was there. She went down again and tried the door, full of a vague terror. O, if Matt, by long trying, had found out how to open it, and had wandered out in the snow to look up on that bitter night between the clouds, what would become of him! She laid her hand upon the bolt—it was drawn back; then Matt had opened the door and pulled it after him.

Becca was but a little girl; and when she found that Matt was gone, and that the men had none of them returned from fishing, and that her mother and sister were asleep, she sat down on the floor and cried there a long time before she could make up her mind what was to be done; and then she put on her shoes again, and tied on her shawl and bonnet, and opened the door softly, resolving to follow him.

It was very dark, but it had ceased to snow. Becca waited a few minutes, hoping the moon would soon come out; and when it did so, she saw distinctly the print of footsteps; they led away from the other cottages, and seemed to wander towards the direction of the cave.

But still Becca could not rest till she had run on to the cottage where Matt had lived. She tried the door; it was locked; and peeping in, she was sure that no one was inside; so she turned away, and, as well as she could in the sweeping storm and raging wind, she made her way towards the cave, which she knew was the likeliest place for Matt to go to.

Sometimes running, sometimes groping in the darkness, sometimes wading through deep snow-driets, and again cowering under a rock till the force of a stronger gust than usual had spent itself, the child went on, now full of hope that she should find Matt safe in the shelter of the cavern, now sick at heart for fear of what might have happened.

She felt the rocks with her hands, and went slowly on; she surely must be near the place; impatience to reach it made her too hasty, and she struck her face against a projecting ledge, and was compelled to wait for the coming out of the moon. A heavy wall of cloud was moving on—all the heavens behind it were quite bare; Becca watched them; the moon drew near its edges, and turned them of a silvery whiteness, then shone out cold and clear, and Becca found she was not far from the cavern; she ran and stumbled on; she was very near; the voice she was longing for arrested her on her way: 'God! God!' it said, 'O send for poor Matt! let Matt go away!'

In the entrance of the cavern, with the moon shining on his white face, and the bitter wind blowing about his thin clothing and uncovered hair, and driving the frozen snow over his feet, stood the boy. Great must have been the efforts that he had used to get there, and now he did not see Becca nor answer; his woe-begone voice and awe-struck face were directed only to the now cloudless sky, and all his thoughts were given to that great Being whom in the midst of darkness he was seeking after.

The little girl touched him; he was as a stone; she shook his sleeves, but could not rouse him from his deep abstraction. 'God! God!' he uttered more perfectly still; 'and Man that paid, O take poor Matt away!'

The little girl, trembling and shivering with the cold, and faint with running against the wind, sank down upon the snow; and still Matt stood upright, and held up his beseeching hands, till exerting all her strength, she pulled him away, and got him to lie down farther in where the snow had not yet penetrated, and where the cavern floor was dry. Then she took off the shawl that formed her own scanty covering; and as she lapped it over him, he said, faintly, 'Matt shall see God some day, and Matt shall never be cold any more.'

She heaped some drift-wood between him and the entrance of the cave to keep the wind away, and then she set off to run home again for help; but before her exhausted feet, in the gray of the winter morning, had reached the cottage threshold, the fishermen, after their perilous voyage, landed a mile or two higher up, and going into the cavern for rest and shelter, found Matt on his frozen bed. They took him up and chafed his stiffened limbs with their rough hands; they said he was frozen to death, and they laid him down again on his desolate bed, and mourned and lamented over him. Happy Matt! the summons had been sent to him to go, and join that God whom he had sought so long. The days of his darkness and feebleness are over,—he will never be cold any more.

Matt was buried in the village churchyard, and on his gravestone was written—'They that seek me early shall find me.'

If any of us, knowing God better, have loved Him less, and needing God's grace as much, have turned from His face, instead of seeking it, let us think on the history of this simple, poor child—'Let us seek the Lord while He may be found, let us call upon Him while He is near.'

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