

Youths' Department.

Lessons for 1871.

THE WORDS OF JESUS.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH, 1871.

The Ten Virgins.—Matthew xxv. 1-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—They that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. vs. 10.

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS.—Genesis vii. 1-10; 1 Thessalonians v. 1-13.

SUMMARY.—To the slumber of sin succeeds the sudden waking of shame; in the watchfulness of faith the expected fruition of glory.

ANALYSIS.—I. The Parable. vs. 1-12. (1) The waiting, two kinds. (2) The proclamation, two effects. (3) The arrival, two destinies. II. The Lesson. vs. 13.

EXPOSITION.—When and to whom.—The discourse recorded in Matt. xxiv and xxv was spoken without the temple, to the disciples, immediately after the solemn and awful words of condemnation, and the predictions of rejection spoken within the temple to the hostile Jews, and recorded in chapters xxi, xxii, xxiii. See chap. xxiv. 1, 2. Our present lesson, therefore, takes us into very different company and circumstances from those of the last three lessons.

The discourse.—It was suggested by the disciples calling Christ's attention to the extent and solidity of the temple structure which seemed to belie his prediction, and to promise a permanency of the sacred city and national worship. Its primary aim is to tell his disciples what they are to do in view of the destruction of Jerusalem, which was a "coming of the Son of Man." But in the disciples with him, Christ saw the disciples of every succeeding age, saw the entire church, and in that "coming" he saw every succeeding "coming" of like kind and principle, and especially the grand final "coming."

Customs.—The wedding feast was at the bridegroom's house. The bridegroom, accompanied by his friends (Matt. ix. 15; John iii. 29), went to the bride's house, and with festive display conducted her to his home. Either while going for the bride, or as our parable rather requires, while returning with her and her attendant friends a company of virgins, friends of the bride, the bridegroom, or both, joined the procession, and marched with the rest to the house of joy and feasting. This was done in the night, and hence torches, frequently consisting of a wooden staff, a vessel let into an opening at the upper end, containing a wick in oil or pitch, were borne both for use and display. Trench quotes from Ward's description of a marriage ceremony witnessed by him in India, as follows: "After waiting two or three hours, at length near midnight it was announced as in the very words of Scripture, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.' All the persons employed now lighted their lamps and ran with them in their hands to fill up their station in the procession. Some of them had lost their lights, and were unprepared, but it was then too late to seek them, and the cavalcade moved forward."

Terms explained.—"Went forth," vs. 1, to the place of waiting; "go out," vs. 6, from this waiting-place to the procession. "Trimmed," i. e., pouring in oil if needed, and clearing the wick, for which purpose "a little pointed instrument often hung by a slender chain from the lamp itself." "Slumbered," in the Greek, literally "nodded," i. e., a light or nodding sleep. "Slept," sound sleep, following the other. "Ten." This number "appears simply to contain the idea of a definite number. According to the Jewish custom, ten form an assembly." Olshausen. "Wise," more exactly "prudent."

The main scope.—The constant readiness of disciples for the Lord's coming—the wisdom and reward of having it, the folly and penalty of lacking it, this plainly is the general lesson. It is applicable to the church as a whole, to its several branches and bodies, and to its individual members.

Virgins.—Christian disciples by profession, "saints" as belonging to the visible company of believers, as having begun well. The exclusion from the marriage, however, proves that some of the virgins were not of "the elect." Ch. xxiv. 24. Only the prudent or "wise" are genuine disciples. See for the same use of wise and foolish ch. vii. 24, 26. The equal division into wise and foolish does not teach that the disciples represented are thus equally divided.

The start.—"Went forth" from the

world, from the darkness of sin, from the life of absence from the Lord. "To meet the bridegroom." Conversion is a start for heaven. The true convert is constantly "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Tit. ii. 13; and praying, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus." Rev. xxii. 20. Christian hope in its present character is essentially the hope of Christ's coming, for the glory which follows that coming. All the virgins, foolish and wise, stand together. So in almost every revival, the converts are made up of both classes, and no man can tell where future trial will draw its line of separation.

The provision.—"Works as only having a value from the living principle of faith out of which they spring, are the lamp, and with the oil which must feed it. Yet . . . we must go beyond both the works and the faith to something higher than either; the informing Spirit of God which prompts the works and quickens the faith of which Spirit oil is ever in Scripture the standing symbol. Ex. xxxiii. 22, 23; Zeph. iv. 2, 12; Acts x. 38; Heb. i. 9."—Trench.

The waiting.—"All slumbered and slept." The folly of the foolish was first of all the lack of preparation, and with this lack it was foolish not only to slumber but equally to start. The wise also slept. This brings out the long delay of the Lord's coming, and this the tax upon Christian faith, and this the need of preparation.

The summons.—It came suddenly, unexpectedly. The signs of our Lord's coming are the summons to meet him. The tokens of approaching death are such a summons to each man. To every one death is virtually the Lord's coming. These tokens usually take men by surprise. "Go ye out to meet him," is the call. And how fitly this describes the true disciple at such an hour. He waits not to be dragged, but with awe, and love, and desire, he, as it were, goes out to meet the bridegroom. Happy deaths, where this is true.

"Trimmed their lamps."—Christians, when that solemn summons comes, begin to examine themselves anew, to look to the ground of their faith and hope. It is an hour for trimming the lamps, for setting the house in order. So, also, when the Lord comes in the power of his Spirit stirring the hearts of a whole community, disciples are, as it were, compelled to arise and examine themselves, and see whether they can join heartily and with whole soul in Christian work. Thus it is in every great spiritual crisis, but thus especially will it be at Christ's last coming.

The disappointment.—The crisis came, but the foolish found themselves unprepared. They started wrong. The grand defect was at the beginning. Spurious conversions must always end in disaster. "Our lamps are gone out"—in the margin of our Bibles it reads more correctly, "are going out." Not that the light kindled by God's Spirit in regeneration ever goes out, but there is a certain light which is not distinguished by men from that heavenly flame which always fails in the last crisis. The wind blew it out. The storm beats it out, or at latest it is quenched in death's cold waters.

Request and refusal.—The disappointed turn to their companions, but in vain. There is only one fountain of grace. No man can redeem his brother. The refusal simply indicates the Christian's sure consciousness that he cannot communicate saving grace, but can merely direct the destitute where to find it. He obtains grace, the oil of the lamp, only for himself. "Not enough for us and you." Religion is a matter between each soul and its God. We must not trust to our pious relations and friends or to the church. If we do we shall fail. Enlarge, press the thought.

The arrival.—The joyful, expected hour came, the wise were "ready." They had oil in their lamps, grace in their hearts. Blessed hour for waiting, believing, faithful souls. How many sick chambers, how many death-beds, whence saints have gone up to glory, heavens radiance flooding their souls and streaming from their eyes, explain to us the import of this word "ready" They "went in with him to the marriage." It is impossible in this world to explain this fully. Yet the presence of Christ in the soul here faintly intimates what is to be in glory. But where were the foolish? Gone to buy. Not prepared. Opportunities wasted. But none the less, the Lord, the Bridegroom came. He does not tarry because we neglect preparation.

The door shut.—The day of grace will

end. A time comes when there is no more access to Christ. Then excluded from the Lord, and from the company and joy of his saints, in vain is the wish and all to enter.—"Lord, Lord, open to us." The answer is final. It blots out hope. "I know you not." So ends the parable. So ends many a human life, bright in promise but dark in its issue.

The injunction. Verse 13.—Here preparation is presented as a watching. In the parable as a procuring of oil. The command to "watch" brings out the need of a continuous exercise of grace, the parable the need of receiving at the start the genuine grace. The command gives more prominence to the uncertainty of the Lord's coming, the parable to the delay of the hour; yet the command enforces the main lesson of the parable.

Final remarks.—Some hold that the virgins all represent true Christians, arguing from the word virgins, the burning of the lamps for a time, and that it is not said, "I never knew you." This seems to me an error, and yet of course the parable teaches principles, and the spirit of folly exists in some degree in all Christians, in a high degree in many. And as in Heb. vi. the issue of this folly, if carried through, might be set forth as in the parable. Churches, or denominations, may be represented by the virgins; and they do not in fact always retain the divine life with which they begin, or "go forth."

What is the name given to this parable? When was it spoken? To whom? Chap. xxiv. 1. The discourse in which it occurs begins and ends where? What is that discourse about?

According to the Jewish custom, where was the wedding feast celebrated? How was the bride taken to the bridegroom's home? Explain the terms, "went forth" and "go out" vs. 1, 6. "Slumbered and slept," "trimmed." Why is it said "ten"?

What is the main lesson of the parable? Who, in the spiritual application, are the virgins? Why the equal division into wise and foolish? What is represented by the first start? Vs. 1. In what consists the folly of the foolish? The wisdom of the wise? What, spiritually, is the oil? The flame? The lamp? What lesson is taught by the sleep of all the virgins?

What is the coming of the Bridegroom, Christ? What the midnight call or summons? What the trimming of the lamps? What the going out of the lamps? To whom did the foolish turn for help in their trouble? The result? The lesson to us?

What is it to be "ready" for Christ's coming? What is it to go in with Christ to the marriage? When does he shut the doors? What is this shutting of the doors?

To whom does Christ give his command to watch? Why is there need that each of us watch always? What is this watching?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Recite.—Scripture Catechism, 349, 350.

WHY KEEP OPEN?

BY REV. J. HENRY BRITAIN, PA.

- 1. The Sunday-school is too beneficial in its influence to be dispensed with for half the year.
2. The sessions of our secular schools are not suspended in winter.
3. These months afford both teacher and scholar the best opportunities for study.
4. Library books and papers may then be more faithfully and satisfactorily read.
5. Unfavorable weather a portion of the time, renders it only more necessary to improve that which is favorable.
6. Overcoming difficulties incident to the season will develop true character.
7. The evils of disorganization every fall will be avoided.
8. Scholars will be impressed that teachers are thoroughly in earnest in seeking their eternal welfare.
9. The avenues of Christian usefulness and sympathy will thus be kept open all the time between teacher and scholar.
10. The winter months furnish special opportunities for the growth of Adult Classes in numbers and proficiency.
11. Satan does not suspend operations for six months in the year. Can Christian teachers afford to do so?
12. Death is busy all the year round, and so should those be who are preparing for death.

"Ella, my child," said a prudish old maid to a pretty niece, who would curl her hair in pretty ringlets, "If the Lord had intended your hair to be curled, he would have done it himself." "So he did, aunty, when I was a baby, but he thinks I am big enough now to do it myself."

If good people would but make goodness agreeable, and smile instead of frowning in their virtue, how many would be won to the good cause.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

LETTER FROM HON. DR. PARKER.

13 SALISBURY PLACE, NEWINGTON, EDINBURGH, Oct. 24th, 1871.

Dear Editor,—

In compliance with your request I propose to inflict on you and your readers some "jottings by the way," which, if not interesting, will at all events demonstrate to you, the fact, that although now surrounded in this old world by much that is attractive and absorbing, both to the eye and the mind, I have neither forgotten my promise nor those I have left behind me at home.

ST. JOHN TO PORTLAND—MORE BOATS REQUIRED.

As you are aware, I came to Britain by rather a circuitous route. My journey from Halifax to Quebec by a way very familiar to the travelling public of Nova Scotia need not be dwelt on at any length, as nothing of any moment occurred to distinguish it from oft-repeated excursions made in former years over the same ground. On board the International Steamer which thrice a week bridges the intervening space between St. John and Portland there was a heterogeneous crowd of some four or five hundred travellers, not knowing what to do with themselves by day, and a large number of them finding it very difficult to know where to stow their bodies at night—the sleeping accommodation being insufficient for the number on board. In this connexion let me advise those of your citizens who may be travelling between St. John and Portland, by these International steamers, during the crowded season, to procure a state-room ticket from the Halifax agent, ere they leave, else a plank, with or without a pillow, will very likely be their lot during the night they are compelled to be at sea. Having taken this precaution, I was enabled to accommodate two unberthed gentlemen, in the upper story of my state-room, and as I looked out upon the motley mass of recumbent figures, stowed away on the saloon floors for the night—almost as compactly as spoons in a side board,—I could not but feel, that for that night, at all events, "the lines had fallen unto us in pleasant places."

Not unfrequently, by day, as I elbowed my way through the over crowded saloons, and more frequently by night, the thought would suggest itself. What would become of the hundreds of passengers on board should fire, collision, or other disaster befall the ship in which we were journeying; rendering it imperative on all, hastily to desert her?

To those who have thought of this matter, and examined the very inadequate means of transport—in the shape of boats—which these vessels are provided, to meet a sudden emergency, of the kind referred to, a feeling of gratitude to God is at once suggested, that these, otherwise well equipped and admirably managed steamships, have, year after year, been preserved by Him, and that the thousands upon thousands of men, women and children who have taken passage by them have been safely landed at their places of destination.

With all the care and all the skill, that human ingenuity and thought can devise accidents of the most fearful nature, are constantly occurring on the sea, and along our coasts, and thousands of men now actively engaged in the pursuits of life have been indebted for preservation, to the adequate and well ordered boat arrangements of the ships, which, in conveying them from port to port, were wrecked or lost at sea. I had thought that no passenger ship was permitted to leave a British port without sufficient boat accommodation being provided for every seaman and passenger on board—in case of accident—but I have been in error. At all events, the rule, as I understand it of the English Board of Trade, does not appear to be applicable to the British North American Provinces—but I hope the day is not far distant when such a regulation will be there made imperative, and applicable alike to ships sailing under Foreign and British flags.

THE NOVA SCOTIA LION.

It may not be amiss to mention that if the list of voyagers on this occasion, contained no names known to fame, there was, at all events, one distinguished saloon passenger on board, and he a Nova Scotian—although not a member of the human family. I refer to a young lion, born a few days or weeks before in Halifax—the welp of a Circus Lioness. He was cared for and nursed in the lap of a Circus lady, and

appeared comfortable and "happy under the circumstances."

I neither saw nor heard anything of the natural mother, and came to the conclusion that this good lady was either returning the compliment for Romulus and Remus of old, or, that adopting the suggestion of Dickens in Dombey & Son, she was "doing something temporary with a teapot."

The Railway after some unavoidable delay deposited us at Port Levi early on Sunday morning, and as we steamed across the St. Lawrence to

QUEBEC,

a familiar object from the Harbor of Halifax, the Royal Alfred, bearing the flag of Admiral Fanshaw, met our view.

Accompanied by a fellow traveller, the Rev. D. O. Parker of Liverpool, N. S., the only Baptist Chapel in Quebec was sought and found, and we spent a pleasant, and I trust a profitable day with the little band who worship there. In the evening Mr. Parker occupied the pulpit.

Quebec was crowded to excess, and every available bed occupied by visitors. The Hotel-accommodation at best, is but limited, but on this occasion, in addition to a large number of tourists, the great Provincial Exhibition and Medical Association were being held in the city, and attracted strangers from a distance, who found no difficulty in obtaining food in abundance, but where to get comfortable bed-rooms was another matter. Close stowage, with some discomfort had to be endured for a time by many who were unaccustomed to it.

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC.

At 9 1/2 o'clock on the morning of the 16th September the passengers for England by the Screw Steamship Moravian, of whom I was one, were ferried by a Steam Tug along side, and with their trunks and boxes were hustled on board. At 10 o'clock the gun fired and we were off, with our prow directed seaward. The scenery for a long distance between Quebec, on both sides of the St. Lawrence, is beautiful. Cultivated and picturesque Islands are numerous, and add variety to it. For very many miles below the city the shores of the river are thickly populated. The churches are large, and have their roofs and steeples covered with tin, which reflecting on a fine day the sun's rays gives them a most brilliant appearance. In Halifax, as indeed in all places situated in close proximity to the sea, tin is speedily acted upon chemically; and consequently cannot be used for roofing purposes, as on the Upper St. Lawrence and throughout Canada; where there is an immense consumption of the English manufactured article, which takes the place of slate and shingles. Far down the St. Lawrence lies the "Island of Bic," where Pilots congregate in summer. Here they leave outward bound ships, and take charge of those on their way to Quebec and Montreal, amid fog and rain. At midnight we reached it and discharged our Pilot and the Quarantine Medical Officer, who took on shore our telegrams and letters, and mailed them at the Island Post Office. The official just named, awaits the arrival of the next inward bound Allen mail Steamship, and accompanies her up the River for the purpose of carefully inspecting the immigrants and other passengers. If contagious disease is among them, he detains the vessel, and all on board her at the large and well equipped Quarantine Island, 30 miles below Quebec. Such is the provision made by the Dominion Government for the protection of the inhabitants of the old Canadian Provinces against the importation of contagious diseases from other countries by way of the sea; and, before my return, I hope to learn that a well ordered and sufficiently capacious Quarantine establishment has been completed on Lawlor's Island, in your harbor, and that the Health Officer of the port will be sustained when the necessity for it arises in making the Quarantine of the port thoroughly protective.

The Mail Steamers from Quebec take the Northern route—passing through the somewhat narrow Strait of Belleisle, which divides the Eastern Coast of Labrador from the North Western part of Newfoundland, making the voyage to Liverpool only about 180 miles longer than that from Halifax.

In and beyond this Strait almost throughout the year ice is met, and the temperature of the water being below that of the atmosphere, a kind of fog or mist often hangs about the locality, sometimes so dense as to obscure all objects, and making the navigation dangerous—especially during the darkness of night. We saw several icebergs in this neighborhood, grand and beautiful objects when observed from a distance, with the sun's rays playing upon their irregular crystalline surfaces, but greatly to be dreaded in a position like