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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1872.

ELISHA AND ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, April 21st, 1872.

The Widow's Oil Increased.—1 Kings iv. 1-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James i. 27.

SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATION.—Psalm ciii. John ii. 1-11.

SUMMARY.—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

ANALYSIS.—I. The Widow's Request. vs. 1, 2.

II. The Prophet's Command. vs. 3, 4.

III. The Oil's Increase. vs. 5, 6.

IV. The Debt's Payment. vs. 7.

EXPOSITION.—Meanwhile.—Our last lesson left Elisha at Samaria, ch. ii. 25. If the narrative follows the order of events, as is probable, he has between that lesson and this been off with the kings and armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom, in their war against the Moabites, who lived on the east side of the Dead Sea. The march was down the side, around the south end, into Edom, then subject and tributary to Judah, where the Edomites joined the others, and proceeded north to Moab. It was a desert journey of seven days, ch. iii. 6-10. In distress the three kings in person visited Elisha, who was evidently near. (vs. 12,) thus showing the respect which the miracles of the last lesson, and probably others, had inspired in both kingdoms. He received them as being fully conscious of his heavenly office, vs. 14, and predicted the marvellous deliverance and triumph which soon followed. vs. 16-27. So did God give a new, public, and very signal proof of Elisha's position as Elijah's successor.

The time and place are both unknown.

The woman.—vs. 1. Described as one "of the wives of the sons of the prophets." It thus appears that these prophets were not necessarily unmarried. The Papal doctrine of the celibacy of the clergy has support neither from the Old Testament nor from the New Testament.

The case.—vs. 1. (1) She states it to the prophet, and in her own person. Through her husband she had very likely become acquainted with him,—certainly had learned of him thoroughly. She confides in his willingness and ability to befriend her. Whether she expected a miracle in her behalf does not appear. Kitto conjectures that she might have hoped for the prophet's influence in her favor either with the king or with her creditor. (2) First fact of the case. "Thy servant, my husband, is dead." This first great woe is the source of all her present added woe. How natural then the mention of it here. (3) Second fact. Her husband was godly, and Elisha knew it probably through personal acquaintance and observation, as well as from current report. Her memory of his goodness was both a comfort and a sorrow. She fondly, lovingly cherished his memory, but all the more keenly felt the separation, and especially the dreadful calamity about to befall the dear man's children. In this view how natural her reference to his character. Surely sorrow and sorrows then were just what they are now,—love and lovers; too, have not changed. (4) Third fact. A new heart-rending grief. Her two sons, apparently her only children, vs. 4, 5, were to be torn from her, and taken away for debt. A man had by law the power to sell himself or his children in case of poverty, Ex. xxi. 7; Lev. xxv. 39; Isaiah l. 1; Matt xviii. 25. "The Romans, the Athenians, the nations of Asia, and divers other people exercised the same rights over their children. And in our own day this right exists in the East in all, or nearly all, its ancient force."—Kitto. It seems quite like our times to find a prophet's family without money.

The questions.—vs. 2. (1) "What shall I do for thee," i. e., What is your wish? Not asked for information. Was it to waken hope, or rather to suggest that he in himself could give no relief? (2) "What hast thou in thy house?" i. e., with which to make payment, in part or in full. The first question is what can you do for yourself? So ought it to be in all cases of help. "God helps those who help themselves." Those who will not, ought not to ask either God or man to help them.

The answer.—vs. 2. "Only a pot of oil." Oil was extensively used not only in connection with religious services, but for food. "Dried wheat, boiled with butter or oil, but more commonly with the former, is a common dish for all classes in Syria." The borrowing.—vs. 3. Preparation is made for miraculous relief. Notice. (1) She herself has to make it. (2) The greatness of the relief is foreshadowed. Borrow vessels, for you have not enough of your own. (3) Let the vessels be empty; emphatic,—foreshadowing the miracle and testing the faith. Further directions.—vs. 4. (1) She and her sons were to shut themselves in the house,—the prophet himself, it would seem, not being with them. They were to be safe from intrusion, and also with none but God their great Benefactor,—their unseen Father and Protector. (2) The direction to pour out into all the vessels, explains to her clearly what she must have already supposed somewhat the nature and extent of the miraculous relief. We are reminded of our Saviour's words at the marriage in Cana. John ii. 6-8. Everything in the way of condition depended upon her, though everything in the respect of efficiency depended upon God. The obedience.—vs. 5. She is our pattern. She took God at his word, believed him, and did what he bade her leaving to him the rest. That exactly is what we are to do. It matters not whether we can understand how or why the blessing is to come, what is the connection between means and end, or whether there be any. God in his word bids us do a thing, and makes a promise in connection with it, he will take care of his part. The result.—vs. 6. There could be but one, for no word of God ever did, will, or can fail. Conceive the joy of the mother and the boys as they saw in the flowing oil their gracious deliverance. It was God's grace flowing in upon them in amazing fulness. Jesus is our Saviour from the bondage of sin. And the price of our redemption is not a few pots of oil, but his own precious blood. The sale.—vs. 7. The oil, not the boys, goes for the debt. And see too how, as often, God was better a great deal than the widow's wish or thought. To save her sons, that was the utmost, but lo, she has a great deal more. A surplus was left, on which the family was to live. "God delights to bless, and only our sins compel him to severity. ILLUSTRATION.—If you tell your troubles to God you put them into the grave: they will never rise again if you commit them to him. If you roll your burden anywhere else, it will roll back again like the stone of Sisyphus.—Spurgeon.

QUESTIONS.—Where did our last lesson leave Elisha? ii. 25. What do we learn of him in the 3d chapter? Is it told where the events of our present lesson occurred? Who came to the prophet in distress? vs. 1. Did priests and apostles, as well as prophets, marry? Lev. xxi. 7-14; 1 Cor. ix. v. What church forbids the marriage of its ministers? What was this widow's trouble? Why do you suppose she told it to the prophet? What did Elisha say to the woman? vs. 2. Why did he ask her the second question? What was her answer? vs. 2. Was oil used for food? Num. 7, 13, 19, 25, etc. What did he bid her borrow? vs. 3. What further directions did he give? vs. 4. Did this indicate the nature and extent of the miracle? What did she do? vs. 5. Had her sons anything to do? Why, think you, were they shut in alone? What was the result? vs. 6. Did she receive more than she expected? vs. 7. What was done with the oil? What is a worse bondage than that to which those boys were going? Is there deliverance? How? Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 33-35.

SUNDAY, April 28.—Is it well with the Child? 2 Kings 4: 18-26.

HOW TO OBEY.

Do it at once. Never wait to be told a second time.

Do just what you are told to do. Do not try to have your own way, even in part.

Do it cheerfully. Do not go about it in a surly, cross, peevish way. "Don't fret, and grumble, and talk back. Only cheerful obedience can be pleasant to God and man.

A cross is your portion, if a crown be your reward.

Youths' Department.

THE BUCKETS OF WATER.

BY A. L. O. E.

Were there ever two merrier boys than Will and Frank, when they first came home from school for the midsummer holidays? Their school was in London, their home in Kent; and never had the country appeared more delightful to them than when they took their first ramble together on the day after their return.

"I say, Will, this is better a good deal than walking two and two along the smoky streets; not allowed so much as to swing one's arms, or to whistle a tune!" cried Frank, toying on high one of the big air-balls which he and his brother had just bought at the village shop. His heart and Will's seemed to be just as light as the balls.

Up hill and down hill went the two merry boys, now scampering over the grass, now playing at leap-frog, now racing each other in their glee. Unhappily they took to kicking of their balls instead of tossing them up; and if the poor balls did not stand such treatment, but suddenly burst, and from being of the size of pumpkins shrank down into that of filberts, they were certainly not the first air-balls that have come to so sad a fate.

The longest race which the brothers ran was up a rather steep hill, on the top of which stood a cottage. A very close race it was, for the boys were equally matched in speed and strength, and it was doubtful who was the winner, when they both stood panting and puffing, leaning against the wooden paling which enclosed the cottage garden.

A girl was now within view coming up the farther side of the hill, at the bottom of which flowed a stream. She was carrying two buckets, which she had just filled with water from the brook, and was mounting the road at a very much slower pace than that by which the racers had reached the top of the hill. Frank, who had now recovered his breath, gaily hummed to himself as he watched the girl,—

"Jack and Jill Went up the hill To fetch a pail of water!"

"I say, Will," cried Frank, breaking off in the middle of his ditty, "I should like to have a bit of fun out of that girl and her buckets. Let's have a race down hill now, and we'll each hit a bucket as we pass—you the left one and I the right one—and see which of us sends it spinning to the bottom most cleverly."

"That might be fun to us, but it would certainly be no fun to the girl, who might be sent spinning, as you call it, as well as the buckets," observed Will, who, though just as full of spirits as was his brother, did not let them run away with his reason. "That poor girl has a heavy weight to carry; see how slowly she goes, and how she stops every now and then to take breath! Would it not be better fun if we were to go and offer to carry her buckets for her to the top of the hill?"

Frank burst into a loud fit of laughter. "Catch me playing water-carrier to a cottage-girl!" he exclaimed. "The girl seems a little lame," observed Will, "and not fit to drag those two buckets up all the way to this cottage. Laugh as you may, old fellow," he added, "I at least will offer to help her."

Away down hill he scampered, till he came up to the girl, who, flushed and tired, was scarcely able to toil up with her heavy buckets. Will asked to be allowed to carry the water, just as politely as he might have asked a lady to let him carry her umbrella.

One glance into the kindly face of the boy showed the little maiden that he was to be trusted. Thankfully and gratefully she let Will relieve her of the weight of the two buckets which she had filled in the stream.

Up hill trudged the good natured boy, carrying a bucket in either hand, while the girl walked a little way behind him. Frank stood laughing at the top of the hill, calling to his brother to walk steadily, and remember what had happened to Jack and to Jill.

When Will was about half way up, there was a sound of hoofs and wheels, and a carriage and horses appeared at the top of the hill; then, after passing Frank, they came rapidly down the descent towards his brother. Will stood close by his buckets, to let the carriage go by. I own that he coloured a little at being caught carrying water like a ploughman's son,

when he saw that the carriage was Sir John Dickson's, and filled with his merry children. He heard them laughing and joking at him as the carriage dashed past. "It is silly to be ashamed of doing a good-natured thing," thought Will; "I should have had more cause for shame had I let a poor weak girl toil on with the buckets, whilst I, a strong boy, stood lazily by."

This was the spirit of a true gentleman, but it was not the spirit of Frank, who stood by the paling laughing, and holding his sides, watching his brother, as Will with his buckets slowly reached the top of the hill. When Will, with a deep-drawn breath, set down his heavy load, Frank burst out into a boisterous song,—

"Weary Will Went up the hill, Carrying pails of water, Folk passed him there, Didn't they stare, And were there not roars of laughter!"

Will did not much relish the fun of the song. It has been said that no one sees the point of a joke when he himself is the butt of it; but Will took Frank's laugh good-humouredly, and let his brother have his "bit of fun," though it was at his own expense. Poor Frank's fun was not to last long. His pleasures were soon to shrink like his air-ball—a thing which often happens to those who run after them madly. Only two days after that on which Will carried the buckets, poor Frank met with an accident, which lamed him for the rest of the holidays. In his own wild frolicsome way Frank chose to ride down stairs astride on the bannister, instead of running down in the usual manner. While he was sliding along, shouting out his favourite ditty, poor Frank "tumbled down, and broke his crown," and sprained his ankle into the bargain.

There was a great deal of fomenting, and bathing, and bandaging the poor ankle; Frank was forbidden for a long time so much as to put his foot to the ground. When obliged to lie day after day on the sofa, it was well for Frank that he had a good-natured brother, who would sit by him for hours, and play at draughts or at chess, or chat merrily to amuse him. Lying still for so long was more wearisome work to the lively boy than carrying buckets up hill would have been. The pain and weakness caused by his sprain were like a sore burden to Frank, and Will helped him to bear it in the same kindly spirit as he had shown in assisting the poor weary girl.

On the second Sunday after his accident, Frank managed, by the help of a crutch, to get to the village church, as his home was just at the other end of the churchyard. There was Will's kind arm ready to support his lame young brother.

"Ah, I've forgotten my hymn-book," cried Frank, when he had almost reached the church door.

"Just rest by that tombstone," said Will, "and I'll fetch the book in a minute." And off he ran to the house.

Frank seated himself on the tombstone, to wait there for his brother's return. But very soon afterwards he heard the organ without the church beginning to sound. Afraid of being late, the boy rose from his seat, and without waiting longer, for Will, limped slowly up to the door. Frank was not yet very clever in managing a crutch, the steps down into the church were worn and slippery with age, and the lame boy stumbled!

In a moment a girl, who had entered just before Frank, hastened to the aid of the lad. She was so neatly dressed in her Sunday clothes that Frank did not at once recognize her. But when she had assisted him down the last step, and Frank again looked into her face as he whispered his thanks, he knew his kind helper to be the same cottage-girl whom he had once seen carrying the heavy buckets of water. It was in a humbled frame of mind that Frank limped to his usual place in the church. "How little I guessed," thought he, "when I stood at the top of the hill, laughing to see that girl toil up with her burden, that I—merry and strong as I was—would ever be glad of the help of her hand! I find that we should always be ready to give assistance to others, for we never can tell how soon we may need it ourselves!"

And it seemed as if the preacher that day had chosen the text of his sermon just to suit the thoughts uppermost in the mind of the boy; for it was taken from the verse in the Bible which begins with the words, "BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS."

Drinking water neither makes a man sick, nor in debt, nor his wife a widow.—Spanish Maxim.

THE THREE WISHES.

FROM THE FRENCH.

One winter evening a man and his wife sitting before their fire talked of the happiness of their neighbors who were richer than they.

"O if I could have my wish," said the woman, "I should shortly be the happiest of all people."

"I too," said the husband; "Would it were the time of fairies, and I could find one good enough to give me whatever I desired."

At that very moment they beheld in the room a very small lady, who said to them.

"I am a fairy; I promise to grant your first three wishes; but take care, for after having accorded you three things I can give you no more."

The fairy disappeared, leaving the couple much perplexed.

"For myself," said the wife, "if I am mistress, I well know what to wish. I will not wish so soon, but it seems to me that nothing is so much to be desired as beauty and riches."

"But," returned the husband, "with these, one might be sick, might die young; it will be wiser to wish for health and long life."

"Of what use is long life if one must be poor. I should only be miserable a longer time. Really, the fairy ought to have promised to grant us a dozen wishes; for there are at least a dozen things that I want."

"True," said the husband, "but take time, let us decide by to-morrow morning what three things are most necessary to our happiness, then we will demand them."

"I will think all night," said the wife. "Meanwhile let us warm ourselves, for it is cold."

She took the tongs and stirred the fire, and as she saw the coal burn brightly, said without thinking,

"That's a good fire; I wish to have a pudding for supper. It will cook there very quickly."

Hardly were the words uttered when a pudding dropped down the chimney.

"Out on the glutton with her pudding!" exclaimed the husband, "I am so angry that I wish you had the pudding on the end of your nose."

In a moment the man perceived that he was a greater fool than his wife, for, according to his wish, the pudding jumped to the end of her nose and she was wholly unable to take it away.

"How wretched I am," cried she, "you are a bad man to have wished this pudding on the end of my nose."

"I assure you, my dear wife, that I never meant it," her husband responded, "but what are we to do? I am going to wish for great riches, and I will make you a case of gold to hide the pudding."

"O no," returned the woman, "I shall kill myself sooner than live with this pudding always on my nose. There remains one more wish; let me make it, or I will throw myself out of the window directly."

So saying she ran to the open window, and her husband, who loved her, cried out—

"Stop, dear wife; I give you permission to wish whatever you choose."

"Then," said the wife, "I wish this pudding would fall to the ground."

Instantly the pudding fell, and the wife said to her husband,

"I see that the fairy has mocked us, and she is right. Perhaps we should be more unhappy if we were rich than we now are. Believe me, dear, it is better to wish for nothing, but accept what things it pleases God to send us. Meantime, we will have sauce to our pudding, which is all that remains to us of our three wishes."

The husband thought his wife was right, and they supped gaily without troubling themselves further concerning the things they had desired to wish.

As long as you make drinking respectable, drinking customs will prevail, and the plough-share of death, drawn by terrible disasters, with go on turning up this whole continent from end to end, with the long, deep, awful furrow of drunkards' graves.

Who is wise? he that learns from every one. Who is powerful? he that governs his passions. Who is rich? he that is content.

To be proud of knowledge is to be blind with the light; to be proud of virtue is to be poisoned with the antidote; to be proud of authority, is to make one's rise his downfall.—Rowland Hill.