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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1872.

ELISHA AND ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, May 12th, 1872.

The Little Captive.—2 Kings v. 17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"She hath done what she could." Mark xiv. 8.

SCRIPTURE SELECTION.—Matthew vi. 19-34; Psalm cxxi.

SUMMARY.—The testimony of a little child may lead one to the Highest station to the Fountain of cleansing and salvation.

ANALYSIS.—I. The parties. vs. 1, 2.

II. The conversations. vs. 3-5.

III. The visit. vs. 5-7.

EXPOSITION.—Syria.—The Hebrew name is Aram. The country so named extended from the northern frontier of Palestine to Taurus on the north, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the river Khabour on the east. There were, however, several divisions of this country, among them Syria of Damascus, which is intended in our lesson. This included Damascus, the capital city, and the nearly circular fertile plain in which Damascus is situated, and which extends from the great mountain chain of Anti-Libanus to the desert on the east. The people of this country made war with David, and were by him conquered and made tributary, 2 Sam. viii. 5-6; but in Solomon's time Damascus threw off the yoke, 1 Kings xi. 23-25; and afterwards became successively the ally and the enemy of Israel, 1 Kings xv. 19-20. The unsuccessful siege of Samaria by the Syrians, and their subsequent defeat and subjugation by Israel, are recorded in 1 Kings xx. Three years after, war broke out afresh, Ahab, king of Israel, was slain, and tinceforth during Jehoram's reign, the Syrians continued to make hostile incursions into the country of the Israelites, 1 Kings xxii. 1-4, 15-37. It was in this state of things, while Jehoram, son of Ahab, was king of Israel, that the events of our lesson occurred. Jehoram reigned from B. C. 896 to B. C. 884.

Verse 1.—Naaman means pleasantness. Why this name was given this man is not told, but we know that in those times names were intended to be significant. He was Commander-in-chief, general more strictly than captain. He is called "great with his master," simply to indicate his advancement, the esteem in which he was held. The expression does not determine whether he was really great and deserving. Under his leadership Syria had been delivered, doubtless, from the previous subjection to Israel. The battle is described in 1 Kings xxii. 15-37. The historian does not forget what most do, that whatever the leader's skill, or the army's power, the Lord gave the success.—The immediate superintendence of an ever-present father is a truth to be believed and loved. Mark now the two-sided description of the hero's person. "A mighty man of valor," one side, a "leper," the other side. The words, "but he was," are in italics, not in the Hebrew. Omit them, and the contrast is sharper. On the leprosy, see Lev. xii. It was a disease peculiarly common in the climate of Egypt and Syria. That of Naaman was the white leprosy, vs. 27. It seems that according to the Jewish law, if the white leprosy covered the entire body, the person was pronounced clean, Lev. xii. 12, 13. The reason is supposed to be that in that form it was not contagious.

Verse 2.—The Syrian government, now the stronger, did not care to break them up, and Israel did not dare to declare war. These free-booters took persons and property alike. They would keep or sell their captives as suited them. Doubtless this little maid, torn ruthlessly from home, and friends, and native land, had been sold or given to Naaman, for we are not to think of him as having been engaged in these raids. He allowed them, and very likely occasional presents made him less inclined to interfere. This dear little girl was more than usually attractive in person, or the great general would not have had her, and her words of kindness and good-will reveal a spirit of singular sweetness. As the attendant of Naaman's wife, she was brought into close relationship with the family. Probably she was treated kindly.

Verse 3.—She knew that the leprosy was a great plague, and that both her mistress and master would most gladly be rid of it. She knew, too, that by physicians it was

incurable. But she had often at home heard of Elisha's miracles, some of which we have already studied. She may have seen him at her father's, or been to hear him at some "school of the prophets." He who could raise the dead could heal the leper. "Would God he were there with the prophet." Dear child, wishing only good to him who kept her from home and freedom! What is more beautiful and Christian than such spirit in boy or girl, in young or old. Elisha in the last chapter was at Gilgal, ch. iv. 38. The maid says at Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel. The word translated "recover," means receive back. The leper, by Jewish law, was received into the congregation as clean when he recovered,—hence the application of the word.

Verse 4.—The dear child had stated simply and in child's language the wish of her heart. She very likely told of the miracles wrought by Elisha. Some one reported her words to Naaman. We shall soon see the effect. Just that is what any child can do, can tell where there is a Saviour who cleanses from sin,—can say, Oh, would God that my friend would go to Jesus. Such words have blessed and saved thousands.

Verse 5.—It would seem that Naaman was so impressed that he brought the matter to the king's notice. Naaman evidently was disposed to go. The king assents. "Go to, go," i. e., Yes, yes, go; or "come now, go." The two nations were now professedly at peace, hence the one king writes to the other king introducing and commending his subject. The substance of the letter is given in the next verse. The ten talents of silver have been reckoned as making about \$17,000. "The 6,000 pieces (shekels) of gold were a large sum of uncertain value, and the ten changes of raiment were splendid dresses for festive occasions." We cannot even approximate the value of the whole as represented in terms of our present currency. It was simply immense. A high officer, the king's favorite, asked a favor next to life itself, and no amount was too great to pay in return.

Verse 6.—Nothing is said here of the style and state in which the journey was made. We can infer it, and our next lesson will show it. The customary formal opening of the letter is omitted by the historian. The letter reads as though the king of Israel was expected to work the miracle, "that thou mayest recover," etc.; and the next verse suggests that he so understood it. The letter showed the false impression, that a king has power to command the miraculous agency of God's prophet. Such a blunder would be natural to a heathen monarch.

Verse 7.—It is possible that the king's anxiety arose from his knowledge that he had no power to command Elisha to work a miracle, and the great improbability that God would work this cure, or move Elisha to ask it. "He rent his clothes," in token of his distress of mind. "Wherefore, consider," etc. These words seem to have been spoken to his state councillors. The conclusion as to the motive of the Syrian monarch was natural for one who knew the deceit and craft of men, and especially of rulers. The Syrian power was not such that he cared again to encounter it and run the risk of a defeat worse than the last, and which might end in a complete subjugation.

QUESTIONS.—Had the Syrians ever been subject to the Jews? 2 Sam. viii. 5, 6. What do we learn from 1 Kings xxii. 31, 37? Which nation seems to have been the stronger at the time referred to in our lesson? vs. 7.

Who was Naaman? v. 1. Why was he held in such honor? vs. 1. Tell about that disease? Lev. xii.

How came the little maid to leave her home in Palestine? How came Naaman to have the maid?

What did she say to her mistress? vs. 3. What prophet did she mean? vs. 8. Who heals from sin? Ought we all to speak of him to others?

To whom did Naaman tell the matter? vs. 5. What did the king say? What did Naaman do? Why did he take such a mass of treasure?

Why did the king not write to Elisha? What did the king of Israel do on reading the letter? What did he say? Why did he think Naaman had been sent?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 40.

SUNDAY, May 19.—The Leper Healed. 2 Kings 5: 8-14.

Sin is but a bitter-sweet at best; and the fire colors of the serpent do by no means make amends for the smart and poison of the sting.

Youths' Department.

SMILE WHENEVER YOU CAN.

When things don't go to suit you, And the world seems upside down, Don't waste your time in fretting, But drive away that frown; Since life is oft perplexing, 'Tis much the wisest plan To bear all trials bravely, And smile whenever you can.

Why should you dread to-morrow, And thus despoil to-day? For when you borrow trouble, You always have to pay, It is a good old maxim, Which should be often preached— Don't cross the bridge before you, Until the bridge is reached.

You might be spared much sighing, If you would keep in mind The thought that good and evil Are always here combined, There must be something wanting, And though you roll in wealth, You may miss from your casket That precious jewel—health.

And though you're strong and sturdy, You may have an empty purse, And earth has many trials Which I consider worse! But whether joy or sorrow Fill up your mortal span, 'Twill make your pathway brighter To smile whenever you can.

THE BOY WITH A BLACK EYE.

"Harry, where did you get that black eye?" said a school-teacher, one day, to a sprightly-looking boy. "I would rather not tell you, sir," replied the boy firmly, but with a respectful manner. "But I wish to know," said the teacher. "Excuse me, sir, but I cannot tell you," said the boy. "Then I must whip you!" the master added.

Harry bore the whipping in silence, though he felt he did not deserve it. He ought to have answered his teacher's question, but as he could not do so without telling of his defense of a poor little boy who was being oppressed by two older ones, he bore his whipping in silence. That noble boy was Sir Henry Havelock!

"SMALL POTATOES."

"Your minister is only small potatoes," was a thoughtless remark which sent an arrow to the soul of one of the praying ones in the pastor's flock. It levered her sleepless pillow, and cast an unwelcome shade over her aged brow, as she took her seat at the breakfast table the next morning. Small potatoes literally were before her; and as she tasted, her face resumed its wonted cheerfulness, and peace was restored to her soul. "Solely," said she, in her own eloquent strain, "these potatoes are good for food and greatly to be desired; and shall the heavenly manna be rejected, which God's providence provides for us, though it be small as the hoar frost on the ground?" And that slight figure which for more than four-score years had withstood the storms of earth, continued to brave life's conflicts, and Sabbath after Sabbath her eager listening trumpet for the unaided ear no longer caught the music of his voice) cheered the pastor's heart. Her prayers he knew were daily on his behalf, and the faithful pastor knew the value of such worshippers. Who can tell how much of the success of that ministry of a score of years was due to her prayers, to her influence, and those of such as she in that church?

HOME PROVERBS.

Proverbs intrude when least expected. They offer unasked advice, be it welcome or unwelcome. They will take no denial; they will be heard; and not seldom their unobtrusive effrontery has turned the scale. How often has the unwary footsteps of one, who fancied himself or herself in love, been checked by the solemn deliberate tone of the old proverb, "Marry in haste and repent at leisure."

And so, I apprehend, it was a fore-thoughtful fatherly love which gave us

divinely inspired proverbs, that lay bare the miseries of ill-assorted wedlock: "It is better to dwell in a corner of the house-top than with a brawling woman in a wide house;" or again: "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike;" or, again: "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman that is without discretion;" or, again: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones."

If some minds, however, need caution, others need stimulus; and proverbs are equally ready with the rein or the spur. My private conviction is, that many a man would have hung back and lost his prize if it had not been for the old homely saying, "Faint heart never won fair lady." Or, "If ye will not when ye may, When ye will ye shall have nay, Or, "By the street of 'By-and-by' one arrives at the house of 'Never.'"

A most beautiful proverb comes to us, as so many of our richest thoughts come, from that family in which all the families of the earth are blessed: "Marriages are made in heaven." Archbishop Trench is mistaken in claiming this saying as a native of England. It daily comes, however, neither from heathendom nor Christendom, but from the Jewish Talmud: "The Holy One, blessed be he, sits in heaven and makes marriages;" and it is thus the echo of the inspired words the Rabbis knew so well: "A prudent wife is from the Lord."

Now with regard to the dwelling-place, one proverb whispers, "Do not build for fools build houses for wise men to live in;" and another from joyous Italy, "Where entereth not the sun, there entereth the physician;" and many proverbs conjure you not hastily to move from house to house, "Three moves are as good as one fire;" and, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." Let the home, however, be chosen and occupied.

Now come the maxims, "Cut your coat according to your cloth;" Give me neither poverty nor riches;" for it is generally true—

"They that have money are troubled about it; And they that have none are troubled without it."

If any be rich let them weigh well the Jewish proverb, "Alms are the salt of riches;" and if poor, let us not forget that St. Paul urges "The labor of our hands, that we may have, to give to him that needeth;" "Home is home, though never so homely;" and this we may be sure of, the giver's home will never be without "a trap to catch a sunbeam."

But to hasten on. Children come; blessings on them! He that sends mouths, sends meat." Let this settle the whole matter. This care our Father takes upon himself. Far more weighty is the responsibility of example and education. "What you are preaches all day long." "Walk straight, my child," quoth the crab to her daughter; "not with that awkward side-long gait." "Pray thee, mother," replied the bantling, "be so good as to show me how." Discipline, too, there must be; for the proverb, "Better the child weep than the father," has in it a deep mine of truth. Then comes the choice of an honest and honorable calling: "He that teacheth not his son a trade," says Rabbi Judah, "doth the same as if he taught him to be a thief."

"He that hath a trade in his hand, to what is he like? He is like a vineyard that is fenced." There will, however, be passages of tears in life's journey, which the most loving pilgrim must tread; but as a Gaelic proverb beautifully says, "During distress God comes; and when he comes, it is no more distress." But in joy or sorrow—the blessing of the Lord is in the dwelling of the righteous, and the hopeful among pilgrims are ever praying "To look on the bright side of things is worth ten thousand pounds a year."

"There's no place like home," or as expressed in beautiful Gaelic proverb, "The man who went farthest from home, the sweetest melody that ever met his ear was, 'Homeward.'"

Here I must pause; but we can hardly speak of making and keeping an earthly home with out the words of Samuel Rutherford recurring to our mind: "Build your nest upon no tree here, for you see God has sold the forest to Death; and every tree upon which you would rest, is ready to be cut down, to the end that we may flee and mount up and build upon the rock;" words which find expression in a line of Cowper's that is fast becoming a proverb: "He builds too low who builds below the skies."—Rev. E. H. Bickerstith.

ON THE DOWN GRADE.

An old California stage-driver was on his death-bed. His eyes were closed. His hands were cold. He was rapidly reaching the "station" at the end of his "run" of life. A friend standing by observed that the dying man was moving his right foot with a sort of convulsive jerk, and said to him, "What's the matter?" The dying stage-driver replied: "I'm on the down grade, and I can't reach the brake."

1. Death comes to all. No will-power of man can resist it. After the most faithful effort to reach the heights of middle life; of the steadiest pressure on the "brakes," to ease the descent to death, there comes a moment when the foot refuses to obey the will, when the "brake" slips from our hold, and we glide down to our doom of death. This is invariable and unavoidable.

2. The tendency of sin is downward. It sweeps the soul on with a swift current. The descent may be slow, and at first imperceptible, but it is sure, and at every step the downward inclination increases, and the movement becomes more rapid. It is very deceptive, often delightful; but, unarrested, it is damning. How terrible to find one's self on the "down grade" at the end of life?

3. The hold upon the "brake" lost! How terrible! The frantic steeds press on. The unlightened load pushes upon them. The deep chasm yawns now on this side, now on that. The stage reels. The passengers shriek out in the agony of fear, and then of despair. Convulsively the driver reaches after the brake. It is in vain. Too late! The speed of this chariot of death cannot be checked. The ruin is ir retrievable. Habit is master now. Passion is master now. The will is demoralized. Hope is gone. Strength is gone. Time wasted returns no more. Down, down, down. A cry! a deep darkness! Silence!—S. S. Journal.

TWO KINDS.

There are two kinds of girls: one is the kind that appears best abroad, the girls that are good for parties, rides, visits, balls, etc., and whose chief delight is in such things. The other is the kind that appears best at home, the girls that are useful and cheerful in the dining-room, the sick room, and all the precincts of home. They differ widely in character. One is frequently a torment at home; the other is a blessing. One is a moth, consuming everything about her; the other is a sunbeam, inspiring life and gladness all along the pathway. Now, it does not necessarily follow that there be two classes of girls. The right education would modify them both a little, and unite their characters in one.—Morning Watch.

NEATNESS IN DRESS.

The philosophy of appearances appears to be this. A man owes it to his self-respect to be well dressed. This obligation devolves upon him also as part of his duty to others. So far as he is individually concerned, it may be the wisest, wittiest, most estimable, of his race; but these qualities are not written all over him in capital letters, and therefore unless he bears about his person visible credentials, he places a barrier between himself and due consideration, and it may be legitimate chances of success. So far as the claims of society go, the case is yet stronger. It may be urged that in a free country a man has a right to make ducks and drakes of his own reputation and prospects, but assuredly he has no right to compromise those with whom he comes in contact,—his relatives, his friends, or even business acquaintances. The shabby or slovenly man does this with callous indifference; but it is an indication of selfishness and an absence of all those finer instincts which go to make up the charms of superior natures.—Ins. Record.

What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. They are but trifles, to be sure, but, scattered along life's pathway, the good they do is inconceivable. A smile, unaccompanied by a kind word, has been known to reclaim a poor outcast, and change the whole current of a human life. Of all life's blessings, none are cheaper, or more easily dispensed, than smiles. Then let us not be too chary of them, but scatter them freely as we go; for life is too short to be frowned away.

It is with some good qualities as it is with the senses; they are incomprehensible and inconceivable to such as have them not.