

Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N. S., APRIL 10, 1872.

THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1872.

ELISHA AND ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, April 14th, 1872.

The Waters Healed.—2 Kings ii. 19-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." John iv. 14.

SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATION.—John v. 1-14; Prov. i. 7-33.

SUMMARY.—God in his mercy cleanses, and in his justice punishes. The respecters of his servants he honors, but abhors their despisers.

ANALYSIS.—I. The Foul Waters Healed, vs. 19-22.

II. The Young Mockers Slain, vs. 23-25.

EXPOSITION.—Jericho was near the Jordan and opposite the place of the miraculous passage, seven or eight miles from the river, and about seventeen from Jerusalem. Luke x. 30, "a hard road to travel,"—in a plain at the base of a naked overhanging mountain; on which doubtless there was a citadel of defence. It is first mentioned in Josh. ii. 1-21, in connection with the spies sent by Joshua. It was the first city taken, and destroyed by the Hebrews in Palestine, or rather by the Lord for the Hebrews. See Josh. vi. A curse was pronounced upon the man who should rebuild the city. Josh. vi. 26. This curse fell upon Hiel, in the days of Ahab, more than five hundred years afterward. 1 Kings xvi. 34. This rebuilding, we are to remember, was but a few years before the events of our lesson. But already it had the honor of containing one of the "schools of the prophets," of being a centre of heavenly light. As just before it was visited by the two prophets, so now revisited by Elisha, he remains till the return of those sent out on the fruitless errand of seeking on earth the man who was in heaven, vs. 18.

The request.—vs. 19. (1) By "the men of the city," the citizens in distinction from "the sons of the prophets." (2) The form of their request is that of suggestion. They point out a desirable change, trusting him to take the hint and make the change, indicating, perhaps, respect and modesty. (3) The thing desired is a favor for the city. Only one thing seemed wanting to the city's prosperity, but that a most essential thing,—wholesome water. The water was "naught," i. e., worthless, good for nothing, and still worse, positively injurious. It caused disease and death either to vegetation, or to man and beast by its use, or to both, since the word here translated "ground," elsewhere "land," is often used, not only of the soil, but of its occupants also. Is. xxxvii. 11. (4) The thing asked, human power could not give. The men knew that Elijah had wrought miracles, that Elisha was now to take his place.

The direction.—vs. 20. (1) It implied consent, for it looked to the act of cleansing. (2) It called upon them to take part and thus show their faith by their works, prove their sincerity, their partnership in the matter. John xi. 39; Matt. xii. 13, etc. (3) The reason for demanding a "new" dish, for the word translated "cruse," means rather a bowl or basin, has been thought to be either to avoid suspicion of fraud, or better, because of the sacredness of the use.

The healing.—vs. 21. (1) Prophet and people went forth to the foul spring. So in healing the springs of human life, God's agents go to them, even as Christ came to heal a corrupt race. We are not to shut ourselves up in our homes and let God do his cleansing work apart from us. "Go ye into all the world." The efficiency is all of God, he is not tied down to one way, his usual method of working in the kingdom of grace, carries a lesson of duty. (2) "Cast the salt in." Why? The Jews say because the salt rather makes water noxious than wholesome, and hence the miracle is the more miraculous, "a miracle within a miracle." (3) Still it is the Lord, not the people, not the prophet, not the salt, not nature, but the Lord acting specially in his own person, who heals the spring. So in spiritual cleansing, it is not the spirit of the age, nor the ministers of Christ, nor the word of God, however clearly, fittingly, eloquently presented, nor the natural virtue of the sinner that heals, but God,—God only, wholly. "Born of God." (4) The prophet uses great care to have this understood. Mark the care,

"The Lord saith I have healed." (5) The perpetual effectiveness of the cleansing deserves notice. From thence no more death and barrenness, a blessed type of our cleansing in the blood of Christ, by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. John iv. 10-15; Heb. x. 17, 39. "No more death and barrenness."

Fulfillment.—vs. 22. (1) "Until this day," i. e., the day of the author of this book, the waters remained pure. If it was Jeremiah, as is maintained, it was written three hundred years after the event, though in the use of records made at the time. (2) Until our day they are pure. Says Dr. Robinson: "Thirty-five minutes northwesterly from the present village of Jericho, [about two miles from the original Jericho] is the large fountain, Ain es-Sultan. There is every reason to regard these as the waters miraculously healed by Elisha. They are now sweet and pleasant, not cold indeed, but only slightly warm." Thus "the word of the Lord abideth forever."

Departure.—vs. 23. From Jericho to Bethel. The latter city now called Beitin, was twelve or thirteen miles north of Jerusalem, nearly west from Jericho, on higher ground. Here Elisha "went up." For the history of the place, see Gen. xii. 8; ch. xiii; ch. xxviii. 10-22; Judges xx. 18, 26; 1 Kings xii. 23; 2 Kings x. 28, 29; xxiii. 15-18; Ez. ii. 28. Three parties had received signs that God owned Elisha as Elijah's successor, viz: himself at the parting of Jordan, the sons of the prophets in his prophecy that search for Elijah would be vain, the citizens of Jericho in the healing of the waters.

The mocking.—vs. 23. (1) By "little children." The word here translated children, is often used of lads, young men, and servants. Gen. xxi. 16; xxii. 12; xxiv. 29; xxvii. 1; Jud. viii. 20, etc. The word "little," however, shows that they were comparatively young, perhaps from ten to twenty years old. They were old enough to be purposely insulting. (2) They came out from Bethel; this shows that it was a deliberate and malicious mocking. The prophet was going into the city, they saw him on the way,—and from Bethel one can see quite to the Jordan,—and for the very purpose of insulting him they went out. Doubtless they were encouraged and virtually sent out by the wicked Bethelites, their parents and superiors in both knowledge and sin. (3) The reason of this mocking by the fathers through their children was, in reality, their deep hatred of God, and hence of his prophet. (4) The insult has two related parts, the epithet and the command. A bald-head was regarded as a great personal blemish among the Jews, perhaps from its connection with the dreaded leprosy. Lev. xiii. 40-44. Besides, the taunt refers by contrast to Elijah, ch. i. 8. He doubtless had a fine head of hair. Thus the mean personal appearance of Elisha, as contrasted with Elijah, is the point of the taunt. The words "go up," may refer to the walk into Bethel, but better to an ascent into heaven. "You Elijah's successor! Ha, ha, let us see you go into heaven like him." The taunt twice uttered shows the eagerness of the rabble.

The curse.—vs. 24. In God's name,—not his own. We are not to understand by this curse a profane oath, or even a passionate and angry word, but the pronouncing, by the Spirit of God, the punishment which God only was about to bring upon the children.

The slaughter.—vs. 24. Forty-two slain. The children were all God's to slay or keep alive. He slew them as he did to vindicate his own honor, which was inseparable from his prophet's honor. As in Egypt in the slaughter of the first born, he reached the parents through the children. Thus he taught the Bethelites also that Elisha was his prophet. God hates all mocking and derision of man by man, and especially of inferiors by superiors, but chiefly of himself by men. Let children learn respect for superiors, and all of us reverence for God.

QUESTIONS.—Where did our last lesson leave Elisha? vs. 15. Did he remain long in that city? vs. 17, 18. What was the situation of the city? Of its history? Josh. ii. 1-21; vi. 26; 1 Kings xvi. 34. What did the men of the city say to Elisha? vs. 19. Why should they suppose that he could help them? What reply did he make? vs. 20. Did they do as he bade them? Does this show their confidence in him as a prophet? Was it usual for God's messengers, in working miracles for people, to require of them faith, and some act showing this faith? 2 Kings v. 10; John xi. 40.

What did Elisha do to the waters? vs. 21. What was the result? Did the salt make them pure? What did? Is there here a symbol of God's work of grace in man? Show how. Do you know whether the waters are still pure and wholesome? To what place did the prophet next go? vs. 23. Where was Bethel? What do you know of its history? Gen. xii. 8; ch. 13; ch. xxviii. 10-22. Who came to meet him when he went to Jericho? vs. 15. Who as he went to Bethel? vs. 23. How did those men of Jericho receive him? How did these young persons? What did they say? Why should they thus insult him? Do you suppose the men of Bethel encouraged them to do this? What did they mean by the words "go up?" Was Elijah dead? i. 8.

What did Elisha do? vs. 24. What then befell the children? Why should God have thus punished them and their parents? Why is the story of it written? Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 31, 32.

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SUNDAY, April 21.—The Widow's Oil Increased. 2 Kings 2: 1-7.

Youths' Department.

MARCH—(AN ACROSTIC).

Mercy I plead, relentless month of storms— Aching with cold among thy shivering poor— Remember frail and tender human forms, Crying thro' nerve and vein, from sea and shore— Have mercy, stay thy rod, afflict no more.

Weepst thou not with Nature's funeral woe?

Have all thy springs of mercy frozen o'er?

Pity—with heart of ice, and head of snow— O March, the sorrows that thy tears could cure. Resolve to rippling pearls thy crystal bands; To cheerful notes attune thy dirge once more; Enlivening all, swift to th' welcoming lands Return, sweet Spring, health, hope, and joy restore.

Yarmouth, March 20, 1872.

VOYAGE ON AN ICE CAKE.

BY CHARLES E. HURD.

You boys imagine that going to sea is a very nice thing. You sit with your legs dangling off the wharf warm afternoons and smell the pine-apples and oranges, and watch the vessel coming up the harbor with sails spread, and think there is no life like a sailor's. It's natural enough, too. I used to have the same feelings. I fancied when I was a boy that when vessels left the harbor they went where they liked, sailing along the coast and among the islands, and that the sailors could go ashore when they pleased, and were happy as happy could be. Boys have queer notions. They never think of the danger, and suffering, and cruelty on board ship, of which any sailor, if he chooses, can tell them. I can remember just how things used to look to me then. The water seemed so smooth and pleasant; just as if it was made to sail on. I used to play around the wharves and get into the boats, and imagine myself quite a sailor. I've had my days since then on ship board, and could tell you stories that would cure you of wanting to go to sea, if boys ever could be cured by stories. But they can't, and perhaps the best way, after all, is to let everybody learn by experience.

I've never told you about my first voyage. It was a short one; and came very near being my last. I was only twelve years old then, and it is nigh forty years ago; but I remember it as well as if it was only this forenoon.

It was in the spring of the year, and Yarmouth harbor had been frozen over, for the winter had been colder than usual. There had been a week of warm weather, with a slight rain, and the ice had got considerably broken. Every tide great cakes were carried down the channel and out to sea. One afternoon your father, who was two years younger, started with me to see the break-up in the upper harbor. On the way we went past the widow Wilson's, and little Benny was playing in the yard with his sled. When he found out where we were going, he was wild to go with us. He didn't have to ask leave, as his mother was away; so he followed us along in great glee, dragging his sled with him, although the ground was nearly bare. When we got to the head of the harbor, the tide was just beginning to ebb, and the ice was in motion. We stood on one of the wharves for a long time watching the great blocks heaving and crushing and sailing slowly along toward the channel, and so out to sea. About sunset it began to rain, and the wind came up. It was a long distance home round the bend of the harbor, though our house was in plain view. If it had only been clear water, and we had our boat, it would have taken but a short time to reach our wharf.

"We might ride on the ice," said your father. The idea had never struck me. I noticed that every block struck the shore just below our house, and then eddied off into the channel again. It would be capital. We could have such a nice ride, and have it to tell of afterwards. There was a ladder reaching down the side of the wharf, and we climbed down and stood on a timber waiting for a big piece. Pretty soon one came. The end just touched the wharf and swung round sideways, where we were, just as if it had been done on purpose, and we jumped on. It was about twenty feet long, and a little more than half as wide, and just in the middle was a stout pole standing up like a mast, which had been frozen in. It seemed almost like a ship, and we played we were sailors, and shouted, and sung, and had a splendid time. We didn't get along as fast as we had thought, however, and before we reached the place where we intended to land it was dark, and the rain was falling in torrents. We could just see the shore, and the lights, as they began to come out in the village; and we could see, too, that for two or three rods from the shore the water was filled with small pieces of ice—too small to bear our weight, yet large enough to prevent our raft from coming close in. For a minute or two we remained stationary, and we were in hopes that your grandfather would see us and bring something to help us ashore. Then the huge cake began to drift again. We shouted, but no answer came back. Then your father and Benny began crying; but, although I was afraid we should be carried out to sea, I tried to keep my heart up. I was in hopes we could make them hear at the cove, or that the light-house keeper at the Cape might see us. I did not realize the full danger we were in. I knew it was rough off the Cape, and I knew, too, the ice might break; but I had such strong faith that we should be rescued that it didn't affect me much.

When we got opposite the light we could see the keeper trimming the lamp. He heard us, and shouted back. We were not a dozen rods apart. I called out our names, and begged him to help us. He tried to launch his boat, but the ice was piled in heaps by the landing, and all his endeavors were in vain. Then he shouted that he would raise an alarm and send boats; but I knew that he had four long miles to go on foot before that could be done, and by that time we might be out of sight. They could never find us in the darkness, and the waves would wash us off the moment we got into the open bay. I did not dare to give way before the little boys, but I felt sure that we should never see home again.

The water began to grow rougher, and it was not long before we had to cling to the pole to keep on the ice. We could not see each other plainly,—it was so dark,—and the water broke over us every moment. The sound of the fogbell off the Cape grew fainter, and at last ceased altogether. Then I knew we were lost. Your father was a brave little fellow,—braver and better than I. After he had been quite still a long while he began to say the Lord's prayer aloud. He told me afterwards that he wasn't a bit afraid after that. He knew that God would save us. But poor little Benny Wilson! Every sob went to my heart like a knife. I knew his mother would be nigh distracted when she found out that he was gone. He sat on his sled with one hand tight hold of mine, and the other clinging to the pole. He was only six years old, and a weakly little chap at that. I have wondered many times since then how he lived through that night.

After awhile it stopped raining, and lightened up so that we could see a little, but it was worse than the darkness. I did not dare to look at the water,—it was enough to feel it. So I clung to little Benny, who had cried himself to sleep, and shut my eyes. Your father sat still, grasping the pole with both hands, but never speaking. The strangest thing was that we were not washed off. Every wave that came, I felt sure that we were gone; but the ice seemed to lift up with it, and though we were constantly drenched, we managed to keep our place. It seemed as if the night would never go. I tried to make believe I was dreaming, and that I was home abed in my little room, and for a minute it would seem true. Then a wave would come, or little Benny would cry out, and the dreadful reality would come back to me.

Morning came at last, and our courage rose with the sun. I stood up and took a survey, but there was a thick fog, and I could see neither land nor vessel. I knew they would send out boats from Yarmouth, and I had been praying that they might find us. Once I fancied I heard people calling, and I shouted and listened till I was completely exhausted. Then I gave up and shrunk down again. What with the cold, and fright, and hunger, little Benny had fallen into a sort of stupor I had tied one end of my woolen comforter round his waist, and the other to the pole to keep him from rolling off, for the water was growing rougher, and I was afraid I might let go of him. The fog thickened very fast, and at last we could hardly more than see the end of our raft. All at once your father started up and almost shouted: "There's a vessel coming! Hark!" My heart beat so loud that at first I could hear nothing else. Then, a moment after, the creaking of blocks and the sound of voices came through the fog, seemingly within a few yards. I never thought I could shout as loud as I did the next second. An answer came back so near that it almost startled me. They thought, we found afterwards, that they were running into another vessel.

"We're lost!" I cried out. "We are on a cake of ice,—three boys!" "Great heavens?" we heard the captain say. Then came the order: "Down with the boats!" They struck the water in nearly the same minute the order was given, and then we heard the stroke of oars.

"Where away?" came the voice again. "Here we both shouted. A minute after we saw the dark side of the boat as she broke through the fog and slid alongside the ice. I shall never forget the astonishment of the men when they got sight of us, or their exclamations of wonder and sympathy as they lifted us into the boat and pushed for the vessel which was hardly a dozen lengths away. The captain was a rough-looking sort of man, and I was a little afraid of him; but when he heard our story, the tears ran down like rain.

"Go down into the cabin and get something to eat, and dry your clothes," he said; and then turning to the mate, who had gone aft, he cried: "Put her away for Yarmouth!" The owner was on board, and was standing by. "That won't do," said he. "The boys are safe, and you can send them back from Boston," for it seems the vessel was bound to that port.

The captain's eyes flashed as he answered: "You're the owner, but I'm the captain. This schooner goes into Yarmouth harbor to-night if she sinks at the wharf. I've got two youngsters down on the Cape about the size of them boys, and I'm goin' to do just what I'd want anybody else to do if they could change places."

"You know what the consequences will be?" "No, I don't. And it wouldn't make any difference if I did. I'm able to take 'em, and, moreover, I'm willin.'" Head her north by east!" It would be taking up too much time to tell you how they all tried to make us comfortable. We were put into bunks while our clothes were drying, having had a hearty meal first, and it wasn't long before we were asleep. When I woke I found the captain standing by me.

"Jump up, my lad," said he. "You're almost home. We're off the cape now, and by five o'clock you will be in your father's house." Your father and Benny were nearly dressed, and were wild with delight. "I'm going to see my mother!" Benny kept saying, as one of the sailors was buttoning his jacket and lacing up his shoes. Then we scrambled on deck. It seemed such a time getting from Bunker's Island up to the channel. Long before we got to the wharf people had spied us through their glasses, and the word had spread. It seemed as if half the town was at the wharf and you may be sure your grandmother and Benny's mother were not in the rear.

You can imagine the rest as well as I could tell it. It's a part of the story I always skip. I will only say that Captain Crowell, who brought us home, and who was discharged at Boston, was offered the command of one of the finest brigs that ever sailed out of Yarmouth, and went down in her in a storm off the West Indies, ten years afterwards.—Little Corporal.

The worthiest people are the most injured by slander, as we usually find that to be the best fruit which the birds have been pecking at.—Swift.

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