

The Christian Messenger

HALIFAX, N. S., FEBRUARY 4, 1874.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1874.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, February 8th, 1874.

The First Plague.—Exodus vii. 14-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed."—Psalm ciii. 6.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 14 15, 20, 21.

SUMMARY.—God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

ANALYSIS.—I. Moses sent to Pharaoh vs. 14, 15. II. His message, vs. 17, 19. III. The command executed, vs. 20, 22.

EXPOSITION.—Introduction.—Last Sabbath we saw how Moses and Aaron were set free from all doubt, and assured that the time had come when the promise made to the fathers should be fulfilled, that deliverance was at hand, and that it was to be through a series of terrible judgments visited upon Egypt. To-day we see the beginning of those judgments. But before they were sent God sent to Pharaoh his servants to warn him once more, and to give him such a sign of his power to save Israel and punish Egypt as should have convinced the monarch, and leave him without excuse. God did not harden Pharaoh's heart in any such sense as to make himself chargeable with cruelty, or to lay himself under just suspicion of double dealing. In answer to Pharaoh's demand of a sign, the rod of Moses was cast to the ground before the monarch, whereupon it became a serpent. In Egypt the magicians were chiefly revered because of their power over serpents. The serpent charmers, or Psilli, still exist there. The "Haje," or asp, formerly held sacred as a divinity, they can make stiff like a rod, and at will wake it again to life. When the rod of Moses devoured the rods of the magicians, and put them out of existence, there was the sign of the certain end to which a contest between these powers and God would come. Thus viewed, the miracle does not strike us as unworthy of God. The sign, however, did not change Pharaoh. Therefore came the Plagues. Of these there are ten. The tenth will be the subject of our next lesson. In its nature and results it stands apart from the preceding nine. These nine have been regarded as forming three groups, each of three plagues. In each group the first two plagues are announced, the third not. Of all the nine it will be found that the nature of the miracle is determined by the nature of the country and people of Egypt, just as was the sign of the rod. Egypt, in the natural course of things, was more or less exposed to plagues, analogous in kind, but not in degree, frequency, origin, and results to those here described. God meets this nation in a way adapted to the nation.

Verses 14.—Pharaoh's heart is hardened. A hard heart is one which has no kindness, love, pity; which is unfeeling, cruel, relentless. Such was Pharaoh's heart toward Israel. Much has been said on the way in which Pharaoh was hardened, because it is written that God hardened his heart. That statement must not be understood to teach that the process that went on in him was any other in its cause, its nature, or its tendencies, than is that which goes on in every selfish, godless man, whoever and wherever he be. He refuseth to let the people go. So he will fight against God, as does every impenitent sinner.

Verses 15.—Get thee unto Pharaoh. The monarch would gladly be "let alone" by God's servants, but he must be met. Moses no doubt would gladly enough have "let him alone," but the voice said, "go." As it was then, so it is now. In the morning. So in each first miracle of each of the three groups, chaps. viii. 20; ix. 13, and in no others. He goeth out unto the water: that is, of the river—the Nile. According to Hengstenberg and others, the king lived at Zoan, Num. xiii. 23; Psalm lxxviii. 12, 43, and Zoan was on the Tanitic arm or division of the Nile. The eastern stream called the Pelusiac, flowed through the midst of Goshen. Hence the Israelites were near the monarch. Exodus ii. 3; v. 8, 8. It is probable that the king was accustomed to visit the Nile in the morning in order to pay to it divine honor, for it was regarded by the Egyptians as a Deity, and had a temple at Nilopolis.

Verses 16.—The Lord, or rather, Jehovah. So all through these chapters. That they may serve me in the wilderness. Explained

in chap. viii. 26, from which it seems that the Hebrews would deem it sacrilege to offer. Some hold, because the Hebrews offered animals held sacred by the Egyptians. Hitherto thou wouldst not hear; that is, wouldst not consent.

Verses 17.—Thus saith the Lord. Pharaoh was to know that the men who came to him were not acting in their own name, or carrying out their own scheme. In this shall thou know. This refers to Pharaoh's contemptuous reply to Moses and Aaron on their first visit. "Who is the Lord," etc. "I know not the Lord," chap. v. 2. I will smite. God's words, but as Moses and Aaron spoke in his name, and acted in his power, what they did in this matter he did, and what he did they did. Upon the waters that are in the river, and they shall be turned into blood. To smite this, therefore, is to smite Egypt's glory; to grapple with this god, is to grapple with Egypt's guardian. Many writers of ancient and modern times have noticed the fact that the water at its rise takes on a red color, and is called then "red water." Whether the water became literally blood in the miracle, or only of a deep red, like blood, has been a question of dispute. For the latter view, reference is made to the use of language in Joel iii. 4; 2 Kings iii. 22. A literal change to blood, and the miracle is not less in the one case than in the other.

Verses 18.—The effects of the change. This verse agrees with the testimony that "the river abounds in fish, which were anciently a chief means of sustenance to the inhabitants of the country." Loathe to drink the water. "The Nile water is almost the only drinkable water in Egypt."

Verses 19.—Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod. The rod to be used was that of Moses. It could be called Aaron's, as he was to use it as the attendant and aid of Moses. The waters of Egypt. The waters of the Nile. Their streams; that is, the arms or branches. Their rivers. Or rather their canals, which were dug from the Nile, or from the branches just mentioned, to carry water through the country for irrigation. Their ponds may also include the lakes of Egypt, partly the work of nature, partly artificial, in which the waters of the Nile, after the inundation, are preserved for future use. Their pools. "All wells, and especially reservoirs or cisterns, such as are found near houses or mosques." In vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.

Verses 20.—It has been thought that the change of blood referred to, on the one hand, to the deeds of blood, or death in the drowning of Hebrew children; and on the other, to the work of judgment to be wrought by God upon Egypt in the slaughter of the first-born.

Verses 22.—It is not said where the magicians obtained the water for their imitation of the miracle. Some have conjectured that in the borders of the Hebrews the change to blood did not take place, as in chap. viii. 22, 23; others, that "all," verse 20, is not to be taken strictly. How these men made the change of the water, we are not told. That it was not a true miracle is certain. It was a petty and fraudulent imitation—a counterfeit.

QUESTIONS.—Subject of last lesson? What sign was afterward shown to Pharaoh? Chap. vii. 1-13. Why just this sign? What effect on Pharaoh? Vs. 13.

Vs. 14. What was said to Moses? What is a "hardened" heart? How was Pharaoh's hardened? Are hearts now hardened in the same way?

Vs. 15. Whom was Moses to meet? When? Where? Why then and there? Was this probably pleasant for either Moses or Pharaoh? What lesson of duty is here for us? Why was the rod to be used in these miracles?

Vs. 16. Why was Moses to say the Lord God of the Hebrews? Does the Old Testament teach that he was the God of the Hebrews only? Gen. xviii. 25? Joshua iii. 11. Why the request to go to the wilderness? Chap. viii. 26.

Vs. 17. Why is it said "In this shalt thou know that I am the Lord"? Chap. v. 2. What river is here meant? What was its relation to Egypt's prosperity? Why should God thus change that river?

Vs. 18. What effects from the change? Vs. 21. How did the Egyptians get water to drink after the change? Vs. 24. Could God as easily take away our supplies of food and drink?

Vs. 19. What is here meant by the streams, rivers, ponds, and pools of the Nile?

Vs. 22. What did the magicians do? Was theirs a genuine miracle?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 168.

SUNDAY, February 15th, 1874.—Jehovah's Passover.—Exodus xii. 21-30, 51.

Youth's Department.

THE COURAGEOUS LITTLE MAID.

Along the pleasant country road, Where crickets made a merry noise Chirping their little cheerful song, One evening walked two little boys.

The sun had set, and happy birds Were calling to their mates "Good-night," When through the avenue of trees A little maiden came in sight.

Up spoke the little boys, and said, "How are you, pretty little maid! Walking alone so late at night Along the road; aren't you afraid?"

With round blue eyes she looked at them, And shook her yellow, curly head And smiled. "Afraid? And what is that? I don't know what you mean," she said.

Then laughed those roguish little boys, And when the maid had gone her way, Said one of them, with bright black eyes, "Let's teach her what we mean, I say."

"We'll quickly hurry home and get Some sheets and put them on, and so We'll sit upon the fence, and when She comes, 'twill frighten her, you know."

'Twas almost dark as down the road The little maiden came along Homeward, and singing as she came Some pretty little bits of song.

And in the twilight's hazy gray, Like shadows looked the trees and posts; And on the fence, wrapped up in sheets, Perched two white, naughty little ghosts.

"What is it sitting on the fence?" With wonder said the little maid; And then she laughed a merry laugh: "O that, I think, must be a Fraud!"

And on she trotted down the road, And little crickets in the shade Seemed loudly singing in the grass, "Bravo, courageous little maid!" —Youth's Companion.

LITTLE RHYMES,

FOR LITTLE FOLKS TO FINISH.

They put nice feathers into pillows, And make nice baskets out of — Big grasshoppers are curious things; Some butterflies have yellow —

Leaves fall in autumn from the trees; In winter, ponds and rivers — Dogs watch by night and sleep by day, And horses feed on oats and —

Boys learn their lessons from a book, And catch small fishes with a — In winter, snow and ice are seen, But summer showers make fields look —

Beetles and bats fly out at night, 'Tis said they do not like the — In one thing men are not like boys, For men like quiet; boys like —

FINDING THE KERNEL.

BY MRS. JULIA P. BALLARD.

"I wish something didn't have to be done with everything," exclaimed Georgie, as she slowly picked off half a dozen ruby currants from the stem and threw them into a large bowl on the table between herself and her mother. Then as she picked off two remaining ones that were not yet ripe, and put them in a pan with the "green ones," she repeated with a little sigh.

"Yes, I do wish something didn't have to be done with everything." A little rippling laugh came from the low rocker near by, where Jessie, an older sister, sat sewing.

"Seems to me I heard somebody wish that in strawberry time, too, Georgie," she said.

"Yes, the hulls; I did get so tired taking each berry out of its little green seat—" "Calyx, you mean," said Jessie.

"I don't care for calyxes. I call them chairs, and pretend they're bad scholars, and I jerk them out of their seats in a hurry, to make it seem—not like work."

"And then the peas," said Mrs. Embury, with a frown on her face the exact counterpart of Georgie's. Jessie saw a half quizzical look buried under the frown but Georgie did not, although she looked up quickly in a half-surprised and half-questioning manner.

"The peas!" continued Mrs. Embury in a petulant tone as foreign as the frown. "Every one packed away in a tight green box that wont open without a pretty hard pressure on the unseen spring."

"I know it," said Georgie slowly.

"And the beans!" continued her mother, and she snapped, and the older ones taken from boxes like the peas."

"And the gooseberries! Worse than currants, with something to be done at both ends!" said Georgie, still less than half enlightened.

"And the cherries! To be stoned and stemmed one by one," said Mrs. Embury. "Apples, too," joined in Jessie gravely. "Cores and skins! Now if they could only go into pies and sauce whole, or dried just as they are, without paring or anything!"

"And the green corn! To be stripped of three or four close-fitting garments, husked, and after that 'silked,' before boiling."

"Yes, and the dry corn," added Jessie quickly before Georgie could think twice; "the dry corn to be shelled and then ground and baked before you can have a loaf of bread. Mother, don't you wish 'something didn't have to be done with everything?'"

Georgie's sober, puzzled face, as she looked earnestly into her mother's face almost upset Mrs. Embury's gravity. It did smooth the frown away as quickly as a hot iron smooths the wrinkles from dampened linen. She did not dare reply and Jessie went on:

"Just think of it! Seems to me there isn't anything we use that comes all ready. Pumpkins and squashes would never do in pies with their thick tough rinds stewed in. Oranges and lemons must be peeled and raisins stoned. And then all the nuts! Mercy on us! Look at the chestnut! Burrs and shell both! Bad as the gooseberries. Walnuts too, and butternuts! How you do stain your fingers with their shucks, and bruise your thumbs, and crush the meat inside by cracking their hard shells. In fact, as I said before, it does seem as if nothing came ready to eat."

"How about raspberries?" asked Mrs. Embury.

"Well, I believe they are right when once picked."

"And whortleberries?" said Georgie, falling in with the better view of things.

"They don't need much. Nothing, if they're picked just exactly right, so you don't have to 'look them over,' as Bridget says, for dead leaves and the little hard green ones. Yes, some things don't have to have anything done to them."

"I know it; dolls," suggested Mrs. Embury.

"Oh, they have to be dressed, and it's lots of work," said Jessie.

"But not hard work, like shelling, and silking, and cracking, and stoning," said Georgie.

"Perhaps not if you just cut holes in straight cloth and put the arms through and pin it behind, and then fold an unhemmed square of muslin and cross over the breast," said Jessie.

Georgie blushed.

"But if the clothes are made to come off and on, as somebody I know is especially apt to want they should, it's more work than shelling or cracking!" laughed Jessie.

"Well," said Mrs. Embury gravely, "let the dolls go—there's—let me see—children."

A silence followed, broken by Georgie, after a moment's scanning of first her mother's face and then Jessie's. There was no smile on either, but Georgie looked very uncertain whether she should laugh or cry.

"I know what you've meant all this time!" she said, her lip quivering a little, but a brave smile coming to the rescue.

"Children are worse than dolls. Dresses and everything come off and on, and so many of them! Besides the combing and curling and washing," she added thoughtfully.

"And teaching and training; saying 'Yes,' and having it mean 'Yes'; and 'No' and having it mean 'No.' Thinking and judging when to say 'You may' and you may not, and having a smile; whichever way it seems best to decide," said her mother.

A little scarlet flush made both Georgie's cheeks look like June roses, and there was some color in the thoughtful face Jessie bent over her sewing.

"But then," added Mrs. Embury, as soon as she thought the little seed had been sown long enough to be ready for sunshine, "but then, after you do get into the nut how sweet it is! It pays. It is not labor lost. Good children are the crowning bliss of their parents."

"When the burrs are gone," said Georgie with her own sweet ringing laugh.

"Yes. The burrs—selfishness, impatience, fretfulness, self-will, when the burrs are gone we are well paid for the trouble of all the sweetness we have been hunting for and are sure to find with the right kind of search. So I can't say I'm sorry something has to be done with everything."

"It was just one of the burrs, I suppose that made me say that," said the dear little Georgie, always so ready to see and acknowledge her faults.

Jessie gave Georgie a kiss by way of endorsing her ready confession, and added, "As things do have husks, and shucks and burrs, and God has made everything 'very good,' we will be patient, and help cheerfully to get at the sweet kernel and fruit, wont we, Georgie?"

"Yes," said Georgie slowly, and added what I think pleased Mrs. Embury best of all, "Yes, and if some things He made are some how not very good—children!—we can help about that too."

The currants were stemmed long ago, and a little lesson learned at the same time. —Christian Weekly.

THANKFUL FOR THE FROST.

The city of Memphis had been stricken with yellow fever, and was becoming depopulated. The following is a description, taken from the Memphis Appeal of the way the city was affected by the sudden but welcome appearance of frost:

"While it was yet twilight, and ere the dappled east, had yet opened the gates of day to the rising sun, hastily attired men and women, with semi-nude children in their arms, were out in the streets breathing the precious air of purifying frost. Here, stooping down, one gathered a handful of glittering hoar-frost, which, pure and beautiful, lay upon the earth, and gazing on it with somewhat of the gladdening spirit with which the Israelites gathered the manna in the deserts of Arabia, exclaimed, 'O God! we thank Thee for this blessing!' Others came and touched with reverent fingers the pure, cold messenger of health, as if to satisfy themselves, like the half believing Thomas of old, that the savior of the city had not risen, but descended from Heaven, to save the people from the destroying angel of pestilence. Groups of men and women moved from place to place, to prove by cumulative evidence that it was indeed frost, and not some optical delusion; that the wished for guest had not merely confined its visitations to one locality, but enjoyed the freedom of the city. Here a pale-faced, once a handsome woman, with a tender babe at her breast, knelt down on the cold ground to thank God that the frost had come! Poor stricken heart! she and her orphan boy were all that the pestilence had spared out of a once happy family. Strong men, bare headed and bare armed, walked excitedly hither and thither, rejoicing in the fact that a physician had come, to whose nostrums the whole faculty must yield precedence as the only panacea for the terrible yellow fever. Windows and doors were thrown open, woolen and cotton garments were exposed to the disinfecting agency of the rarified air, and everywhere in the city, as well as in the vicinity of the infected region, the enthusiasm was marked, if not as fervent and joyous."

There is now posted in some fields near Doncaster the following warning:—"Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Beware! my friends, your names are all known; if you trespass in these fields, or touch my rabbits, you will be prosecuted according to law." Here follows the name of a clergyman—one of the richest in the district.

"When you put your penny in the box at Sunday school," said one little girl to another, "do you give it as though you put it in Jesus' hand?" The question suggests precisely the right mode of giving.

In answer to a mother's suggestion that she should not forget her prayers in the hurry of the morning, a little girl made the excellent reply: "No, mamma, I consider that a part of my dressing."

DIE, THEN.—A person once said to his minister, the Rev. Mr. C., that it was impossible to carry on business in this imperfect world and be honest, and get a living. "Die, then," was the emphatic reply.

Great occasions of serving God present themselves but seldom, but little ones frequently. Now he that is faithful in that which is least is also faithful in much.