

The Christian Messenger

HALIFAX, N. S., MARCH 4, 1874.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1874.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, March 8th, 1874.

Bitter Water sweetened.—Exodus xv. 22-27. (Read also 2 Kings iv. 38 44.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—“And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Rev. xxii. 2.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verse 23-25.

SUMMARY.—Wickedly the Hebrews murmured, but graciously the Lord helped them. He also pledged them greater blessings, on condition of their future obedience.

ANALYSIS.—1. The thirsty march. vs. 22-25. 11. Murmuring caused and cured. vs. 23-25. 2. Covenant and blessing. vs. 26, 27.

EXPOSITION.—The Position.—The Israelites are out of Egypt—they are not in Canaan. Between them and their “land of promise” lies the desert. Through this they must journey. With them we, too, in our lessons are to journey.

The wilderness of the wanderings.—The wilderness of Etham, or of Shur, was a small part of that larger wilderness in which the Israelites wandered forty years. The latter may be said in general to embrace all the region bounded on the north by Palestine, the Mediterranean, and the eastern extension of Egypt, or Goshen; on the west by Goshen and the Gulf of Suez; on the south by the Gulf of Suez and the Eramitic Gulf, or Gulf of Akabah, that is, by the two arms of the Arabian Gulf, or Red Sea; and on the east by the Gulf of Akabah and Arabia Petraea.

The Peninsula of Sinai.—From the general tract just described cut off sixty miles of its northern part, and the remainder is this peninsula. “The Peninsula of Sinai is in shape a triangle, of which the base, a line drawn from Suez to Akabah is 150 miles long, the western side 186 miles, and the eastern 133 miles. There are two distinct tracts of country—the comparatively level district of the Tih on the south, and the rugged mountains of Ter on the north. The latter may be considered as more emphatically the Peninsula of Sinai. The central point in the mountain system is Jebel Katareena, 8,550 feet, the highest mountain in the peninsula. The general aspect of the country is one of utter barrenness and desolation, but there are a few green spots in the upland basins, and in some of the narrow passes and rocky glens. Notwithstanding the desert soil, there are few parts of the peninsula which do not show some signs of vegetation. The valleys and plains are sparsely clothed with many varieties of almost sapless herbs and shrubs, some of which manage to exist even on the rugged hill-sides. There are many signs of the vegetation having been increased by former cultivation. Animal life exists to no very great extent in the peninsula. One may still see the hyena and the ibex, or “wild goat” of the Bible, which is found among the higher mountains; the dorcas gazelle, on the eastern plains; the Sinaitic hare, in the upland plains; the coney, in the mountains; the jackal, fox, porcupine, mequc, and, occasionally, the leopard. There are partridges, sand-grouse, some quails, and, near the Red Sea, duck, teal, and other water-fowl. The other birds are chiefly chats, finches, and warblers. The climate, especially in the mountainous parts, is very healthy. One of its most remarkable features is its intense dryness. In winter it is very cold in the mountains, and snow often falls, though it is never seen lower than 4,000 feet. The heat in summer is proportionately intense, especially in the lime-stone districts, and the Khamseen winds, which occur generally in the spring, render the usually clear atmosphere stifling and oppressive.”

Verse 22.—Wilderness of Shur. Same as wilderness of Etham. Chap. xiii. 20; Num. xxxiii. 8. At the northwest angle of the peninsula. Shur means walls, and the name was perhaps given to this part of the peninsula “from the wall-like range of mountains by which it is bounded,” “a long line of white cliffs.” “The Arabs know many places in the peninsula by two names.” They went three days into the wilderness. In a south southeast course,

nearly parallel with the Gulf of Suez. If the starting point was the present Ain Marah (well of Moses), and, as is probable, Marah is to be identified with the present Hawara, the distance was about forty miles; and the country is at present, as then, wholly without water.

Verse 23.—Came to Marah. This name, meaning bitter, the Hebrews seem now first to have given to the fountain. The place is confidently identified with the present Hawara, which is a fountain “situated in a rocky valley, two or three miles in diameter. It is near the centre of the valley, and springs out of the top of the mountain, which has the form of a flattened hemisphere, and the elevation of perhaps thirty or forty feet above the general level of the valley. The water rises into a basin which is formed by the deposit of a hard, shining substance, and may be from eight to ten feet long, by a breadth somewhat less. In depth it is five or six feet, and contains three feet of water. This water is disagreeable—bitter and salt—and is declared by the Bedouins to be the worst in the desert.” The supply of water is thought to be far less now than anciently.

Verse 24.—Murmured against Moses. They have liberty now, but no water; and what is liberty without water? What a contrast to goodly, fertile, well-watered Goshen is this wretched region! There they had the sweet, delicious water of the Nile to drink; here, either none or what is still worse than none. It was wicked in these people to murmur, and ask, reproachfully and despairingly, What shall we drink? As though God could not and would not provide! As though Moses was to be blamed! As though he had chosen the way, and was the cause of their troubles! So men now blame God’s ministers, when God’s truth and providence do not suit them.

Verse 25.—Cried unto the Lord. Moses was a most unselfish and patriotic man. This cry was that of intercession—prayer for the deliverance of the people—not for himself. This nobility of soul appears all the way along, and is the prime moral qualification in a leader of the people—a public-servant. Showed him a tree. Or wood. The Hebrew word admits the meaning “woods,” that is, a piece of wood, and the casting it into the water favors the translation here. Were made sweet. Not by any inherent virtue of the wood or tree, but by the power of God’s will exerted on occasion of casting the wood into the water. Compare the account of the healing of the blind man by Christ, in John ix. 6, and that of Elijah’s raising the child, in 1 Kings xvii. 21. He made for them a statute and an ordinance. Now began more distinctively the process of compacting them into a nation, with government and laws. They were to know God as King, themselves as subjects. The next verse is not to be taken as a full statement of this “statute and ordinance,” but as an indication in brief of its nature. There he proved them. God proves his children all along their way, by causing all things to seem to be against them, and thus cutting down the props of sight, that faith may be required for the soul’s support. These Hebrews never dreamed of having such a time as this.

Verse 26.—None of those diseases. This may refer to the judgments just visited upon Egypt; but if so, it certainly is not to the exclusion of its reference to the natural diseases common among the Egyptians. Deut. vii. 15; xxviii. 60. Egypt has been called “a great and universal focus” of pestilence.” Another says that though “it has but a small number of diseases, they are mostly of a fearful character. That heathen thee. They had been delivered already, not only from the “plagues of Egypt,” but from its various diseases, just as God had now healed the waters of the spring.

Verse 27.—Elim. This is identified with the present Wadi Gharendel, two and a half miles south of Marah, (this is, Hawara), “in a beautiful valley of almost one English mile in length, and abounding in good water. Excellent fountains and a great number of trees, especially palm-trees, are still found in that valley, so that it is still chosen as one of the chief stations on the journey to Sinai.” The number of fountains corresponds to the number of the tribes. This encampment at Elim is a type of spiritual refreshment.

QUESTIONS.—What was done by the Israelites before their next march? vs. 1-21. Can you briefly describe the country in which they spent the next forty years. Vs. 23. Into what wilderness did Moses lead the people? Comp. chap. xiii. 20; Num. xxxiii. 6, 9. What direction did

they take? What is said of their journey? Where did they stay? vs. 1-20. Is any such spring still in existence in that region?

Vs. 24. What was the effect on the people? How did this country and this water compare with Goshen and the Nile-water? What was there wrong and unreasonable in their murmuring?

Vs. 25. What did Moses do? Why that? In what spirit? Is he in this a pattern for us? Explain. What statute and ordinance did God here make?

Vs. 26. What is meant by his proving the Israelites? Does he still prove his children? How? Why?

Vs. 28. What requirement of the Hebrews? What promise to them? What diseases are here meant? Deut. vii. 15; xxviii. 60.

Vs. 29. Where did they next encamp? Of what spiritual experience is this a type? John iv. 10.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 173.

SUNDAY, March 15th, 1874.—Bread from Heaven.—Exodus xvi. 1-5, 31-35.

Youth’s Department.

HOW DR. DAVID PAID HIS DEBT.

BY ETHEL LYNN BEERS.

“Please to let Benny get warm, sir? He’s most froze. I was carryin’ him round to the place where I sell papers, and he kind o’ wilted right down, and this man said he would carry him home, but it’s an awful long way from here, and he ain’t over strong, Benny aint.”

Dr. David had left his school-room full of unruly scholars, at the sound of a timid knock. Opening the door, he found a ragged newsboy looking wistfully in his face. One cold and dingy hand clutched his shabby hat, while the other picked at its dilapidated brim. The snow was falling fast, and though the air made misty by the white flakes, Dr. David could see a man holding close to his great rough beard all powdered with snow the pale face of a little child. The eyes were shut, but one thin hand clung tightly to the old coat of his protector. The man said nothing but waited patiently the result of the petition, and to Dr. David’s question, answered only “Me German,” seeming quite sure of the boy’s success, and quite distrustful of his own ability to aid by words. Dr. David looked down on the little petitioner—“And you want to leave Benny here for me to take care of, eh, little man? how do I know that you’ll ever come back again for him? You newsboys are up to all kinds of tricks, pretty nearly as bad as the city boys. What is your name? Where do you live? Is there nobody to take care of Benny but you?”

The boy shook his thick hair back, and crushed his hat into a shapeless mass as he looked up into Dr. David’s face. “Nobody but me, nobody since my mother died. Father died ever so long ago. I kin take care of him good—but to-day he was afraid to be left and I tried to bring him along. I’m Bob Bowers, an’ live down by the cooper-shop.”

Dr. David was a kind-hearted man, but withal exceedingly cool and cautious. He thought about all the disorder that would ensue when the little child was seated in the small school-room, among the scholars. He thought of the chances of being left with a sickly boy to care for altogether, but the appealing and wistful look in the brown eyes soon overcame all scruples and he bid the children both come in. Benny was seated in an old wooden settee by the side of the stove, and Dr. David folded up his own coat to make a rest for his head. You may be sure there was a commotion among the scholars and loud comments on Bob Bowers’ ragged clothes and rough hair. He shook his grimy fist at one or two when Dr. David was looking another way—“I’ll come back, sir, by three o’clock sure,” said Bob; then whispered loudly to Benny.

“Don’t you git skeery; I’ll be back fore you can say Jack Robinson;” and with another hitch at the tow string that served for suspender he ran off as quickly as his old shoes would allow.

When recess came Dr. David was obliged to stand guard over the little yellow-haired lad in the corner who looked about him like a strange cat. The boys called him “sissey,” and blew back his yellow curls whenever they got a chance; they made horrible faces at him until tears came in his big eyes, and then called him “Miss Nancy,” until he began to think he would rather have been out in the freezing cold and snow.

It was not until Dr. David had called the ring-leader aside and told him in confi-

dence that “he wished he would keep a ~~the water in the box~~,” that he did not worry the poor motherless, sickly lad,” and so disarmed him altogether, that there was anything like peace.”

Benny lay down on the coat and slept all the afternoon, until the school was dismissed, and Bob had not yet appeared.

Dr. David began to have some misgivings now, and to speculate on the chances of being left with the sick boy on his hands, but resolved to wait a little longer before he felt any serious distrust.

Meantime he tried to divert the little fellow who was growing quite unhappy and restless. He had gentle girlish ways and a soft voice, quite unlike the great schoolboys with whom Dr. David had to deal. He told of his long fever and all the queer visions that he had while it lasted, and of the kind lady who came every day to see him until she had to go to her home in another city.

There was always a sparkle in his eye when he spoke of Bob, and he said over and over, “Bob promised mother, and Bob’ll stick to me I bet you.”

“And can you skate any, Benny?” said Dr. David, by way of amusing him.

“Not much, sir; only with one foot; I had an old skate, but a feller can’t do much with one. My mother used to live by a big river, and in winter-time it froze all over, and the college-boys came down like the wind on the ice, she says; she used to see lots o’ ’em. Sometimes towards spring the ice got thin and every once in a while some chap got most drowned. Mother used to tell me how she saved one feller’s life—”

“Did your mother save somebody’s life?” asked Dr. David as he stopped in his walk to and fro, and sat down beside the little lad.

“Yes, sir, she did; I’ve heard her tell when she was a young girl. That must have been awful long ago, mustn’t it?”

“Tell me all about it,” said Dr. David, as he looked long and earnestly at the big brown eyes that had a strangely familiar look, the same look he had seen in Bob’s upturned face.

“Well”—Benny felt quite proud that his story had such an interested listener—“well, mother used to tell me about it, over and over, when I was getting well, and wanted stories every minute. She used to teach in the district school, and she had to go close by the river every day. So one day she saw a college feller comin’ along like a scambout, round by the bend. There had been a thaw, so the ice was dreadful thin, she saw him comin’ right straight on towards a cracked place in the ice that he didn’t see at all. She bollered, and threw up her hands, and tried to stop him, but he was goin’ so fast he didn’t see her, and sure enough crack went the ice, and he right straight down in the cold water.”

“Then he tried to pull himself out, but the rotten ice kept breaking away as fast as he took hold of the edge. She said it was dreadful to see that white face going up and down, and the poor arms fling out to try to get hold somewhere. Then mother said she made up her mind to try to save him, and she run to the fence and tugged and pulled till she got out a long rail, and she went out on the ice by the shore dragging the rail and telling him to ‘hold on a little longer’ and she’d save him.”

Benny stopped in his story to add: “If you’d seen my mother! She had little bits of white hands, and big black eyes, and yellor hair; when she died—” and then he was still a moment.

“Go on,” said Dr. David almost harshly, as he turned his head away from the child’s earnest look. “What then?”

“Well, she stepped out softly, softly on the cracked ice, then she pushed the rail ahead over the hole at one side, and flung her waterproof so that he could clamber the rail and catch that, and then she dragged him on to the safe ice; wasn’t that splendid, sir?”

“What was your mother’s first name, Benny?”

“Let me see—mother’s name? Oh, I know ‘cause in a little Testament I see it all wrote out. ‘Christie Gray’—that was her name.”

All this time Dr. David had been sitting in his chair, getting up and down, punching the fire, and opening and shutting the stove-door, in a way quite unlike his usual quiet manner. When Bob quite breathless came to take Benny home, he was not a little astonished at the doctor’s manner.

“Benny has been telling me about your mother once saving a young collegian’s

life from drowning when the ice broke in.

“No, sir, not as I remember, but she said he had a queer mark on his wrist,—a shape of an arrow, all in blue dots,” and then Benny stood and stared while Dr. David drew back his sleeve, and there among the blue veins of his wrist, they saw the blue-dotted arrow!

Bob was quite dumb with astonishment, while Benny nodded his yellow head wisely, whispering loudly, “It’s him! it’s him!”

What soft place in Dr. David’s heart was touched, what memories of the pretty teacher who had saved his life came back, I need not whisper here. Something it all had to do with his bachelorhood I shrewdly guess; something to do with his life of devotion to books and seclusion from the world; something to do with his cold and distant manner toward all mankind.

Certain it is that as he looked at the strangely familiar faces of dead Christie’s children, a mist came over his eyes and there was a choke in his voice as he told Bob to pack up and come to his house to do chores nights and mornings, and come to school all day, while Benny would be cared for by his old housekeeper most faithfully until he should be strong enough to join him.

So Bob’s vagabond life was ended, and so Dr. David’s new interest in life began with the snowy morning when the orphan children were guided to his door for shelter and his weighty debt to Christie Gray was paid with interest.—Ch. Weekly.

A STARTLING QUESTION.

Here is a little story, with comments, from the Sunday School Times, which is for every superintendent and teacher—a story to be pondered with “strong crying and tears.”

A poor child straying into a Sunday school one day, asked simply, “Is this the way to heaven?” The superintendent was for a moment startled. Was his school, indeed, the way to heaven? Was he trying to make it so? Were his teachers intent upon the same object? The artless question struck home. From desk to class the question went around with a thrill. What were they all doing? Whither were they all tending? The question was like an angel suddenly come into their midst to make a record of all that transpired in that school. O, superintendents, teachers, make sure of this one thing: With all yours efforts to impart knowledge, make the salvation of the soul of paramount interest!

Whether your school be a model, or be struggling up to perfection, be sure that every scholar shall feel that it is the road to heaven!

A PRETTY PRISON STORY comes from Missouri, where, it appears, a prisoner in the Missouri penitentiary, too weak to work and who had the run of the yard, one day asked the warden if he could be allowed to cultivate a small corner in the enclosure. “What do you want to raise?” “Cucumbers, sir.” “Why, you can’t raise them here, the prisoners would steal them.” “No, sir,” said the man, firmly, “they will not steal one of them.” “Well, go ahead,” said the warden; “if any of the cucumbers are stolen, don’t come to me with your complaints.” “You will never hear from me on that score, sir.” The cucumbers were planted, watered, trained and cultivated, and an immense crop was the result. At last, however, as the fruit grew, it disappeared, and the warden became convinced that the owner sold it for liquor, produce, or some other contraband article. He directed the man to be watched, and finally he was detected in the act of carrying his cucumbers to the hospital and giving them to the poor fellows who in their sickness craved them. Not one had been stolen.

Mr. John G. Saxe, having been invited to address a Temperance Convention, sent the following reply. We doubt whether he could have made a better address.

“You have heard of the snake in the grass my boy. Of the terrible snake in the grass; But now you must know, Man’s deadliest foe Is a snake of a different class. Alas! ‘Tis the venomous snake in the glass.”

A MILLIONAIRE SENTENCED.—A New York dispatch states that in the U. S. Circuit Court Judge Benedict denied the motion for a new trial in the case of Benoni Howard, the millionaire, convicted of counterfeiting match stamps. A motion in arrest of judgment was also denied and Howard was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment in the Penitentiary.