

The Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N.S., MARCH 17, 1875.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, March 21st, 1875.—Joshua's Warning.—Joshua xxiii. 11-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."—Hebrews x. 38.

ANALYSIS.—I. Counsel. Vs. 11. II. Warning. Vs. 12, 13. III. Appeal. Vs. 14. IV. Warning repeated. Vs. 15, 16.

PERSONAL NOTE.—Joshua is here nearly, if not quite, one hundred and ten years old. He realizes that he is "going the way of all the earth" (vs. 14), and, as a father, assembles his people about him to give them his farewell counsel. At first, he addresses the leaders of the people: then, and possibly on a later occasion, the people themselves. The assemblies were held probably at Shiloh.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 11.—The beginning of our lesson is the middle of Joshua's address. From xix. 50 and xxiv. 30, we learn that after the conquest of the land, Joshua, who was of the tribe of Ephraim, received as his separate inheritance, Timnath-serah, in Mount-Ephraim, and there lived till his death. If, as Josephus says, he was eighty-five years old at the entrance into Canaan, he must have lived there some eighteen years, for he was seven years engaged in war and he died one hundred and ten years old. xxiv. 29. It would seem from vs. 2, and especially from vs. 14, that he was near his end at the time of this address. The next chapter (vs. 1) shows Israel at Shechem, where soon after the destruction of Ai we found the whole nation assembled to renew most solemnly the covenant with Jehovah. Joshua's care for Israel was paternal, and his fears were grounded in his knowledge of the prediction of Moses, Deut. xxviii. 20-37, the temptations of the situation, the disloyal tendencies of Israel, and especially the beginnings of idolatry. Take good heed, &c., that ye love the Lord [Jehovah] your God. Joshua knew that love is the very spirit of obedience, and that all God's precepts would be heeded if there was supreme love. Deut. vi. 5; x. 12; xi. 13. But much as this is emphasized in the Old Testament, it is more forcibly urged in the New Testament, by both Christ and his apostles. Matt. xxii. 37; Romans xiii. 10, etc.

Verse 12.—Else if ye do in any wise go back. Now comes warning. Thus far Joshua has set before them life. Now he holds up death. The argument from God's goodness he has exhausted; that from severity is now made. Thus is the argument doubled in both form and power. And cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you. Who of these nations still remained we are more particularly informed in Judges i. These nations, especially the Philistines of the six south cities, and the inhabitants of Sidon and vicinity, were most influential, the latter especially, because Tyre and Sidon were seaports, and doubtless even in that remote age there was a considerable commerce, and the consequent wealth and power. xi. 8; xix. 28. These remaining people, like those already destroyed, were idolaters, corrupt, hostile to the Israelitish laws and religion. Such was the antagonism that to cleave to Jehovah was to reject their life and worship. To cleave to their life and worship was to reject Jehovah. To try to unite the two, or to take a part of each, was to undertake an impossibility. And shall make marriages with them, etc. In Deut. vii. 1-4 we find an express command given to Israel, through Moses, not to intermarry with the heathen nations. There was in fact a still further restriction that marriage should not be between members of different tribes in Israel. Num. xxxvi. This latter restriction was in order to preserve intact the inheritance of each tribe. Paul's instructions in 2 Cor. vi. 14-18, do not expressly refer to marriage, but to all alliances with idolaters in which was involved compromise of principle. Our most important and sacred relation is to God, and we are to form no connection, and take no step in life at the sacrifice or to the detriment of our loving union with Jesus Christ. We have to offer two prayers: 1. "Lead us not into temptation." 2. "Keep us from the evil."

Verse 13.—Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any

of these nations from before you. "Know for a certainty," or according to Hebrew idiom, "Knowing, know," etc. Comp. Num. xxxiii. 55, 56. The expulsion of the heathen was the condition on which Israel was to inherit and possess Canaan and God's favor, and the abstinence from intermarrying is here given as the condition on which God would aid Israel in expelling them. Often do we choose our way till it brings us into trouble, and then find no escape from the trouble, though we repent and strive never so hard to free ourselves. They shall be snares and traps unto you. The Israelites' alliances, and especially matrimonial alliances, with the more wealthy and powerful heathen, would seem not only harmless and pleasant, but positively helpful and wise—a source of both comfort and protection. If they did not heed this warning, they would be caught, helplessly, fatally snared. Scourges in your side and thorns in your eyes. Sin often promises much pleasure. "Thorns in your eyes"—this suggests the most exquisite pain and extreme mischief. Until ye perish from off the good land which the Lord [Jehovah] your God hath given you. "This" land, so long hoped for, now extending in richness and beauty before you. Hence, a "good" land, as all the promises had described it, "flowing with milk and honey"—under the Lord's protection. From such an inheritance, the warning states, they shall PERISH if they keep not their purity in obeying God. Is Canaan a type of heaven, of the eternal destination of the sons of God? Then is this warning meant not less for us than for Israel. If we cleave not to God, and separate not from sin, we too shall "PERISH" from God's presence, and fall of eternal life.

Verse 14.—And behold this day I am going the way of all the earth. If, as we have supposed this was a prophetic utterance, he was near his end. Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls. All of them knew. Nobody doubted, or could doubt. That not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you. God does not promise much and give little. The promise may be less, never greater than the gift.

Verse 15.—It shall come to pass that as all good things, etc., so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things. So hard is it now for men to believe that the punishment of sin foretold by Jesus is ever to be inflicted; that there is to be "the day of wrath." But the solemn warning of Joshua took the accomplished good as proof of the veracity of God in the threatened evil. The nation afterward found that God is every whit as true when he warns as when he promises. Judges ii. 14-23.

Verse 16.—Joshua here seem to have a clear foresight of the fact that they would thus turn away to idols. So are we persuaded by the terrors of the Lord to flee from the wrath to come.

QUESTIONS.—How old is Joshua now? How long is it since the Exodus? Ans. Upward of sixty years. How old was Joshua at the death of Moses? How many years has he ruled Israel? Whom does he call together? Vs. 2. Where? Ans. Probably at Shiloh. Whose example is he following? Deut. xxxi. 1, 2.

Vs. 11. What was Israel's special temptation? Must a man bow down to an idol of wood or stone to be an idolater? See Matt. vi. 24; 2 Cor. iv. 4.

Vs. 12. Do you think it wise for believers in Christ to marry unbelievers? See 2 Cor. vi. 14. Are such marriages sinful? Ans. If not sinful, they are often unfortunate.

Vs. 14. Do you think you are going to die? After death what is appointed? Hebrews ix. 27. What does the Bible say of God's veracity? Ans. That it is "impossible for God to lie"; that his promises are "Yea and Amen."

Vs. 15. What may these threatenings be called? Ans. Prophecies. Are there any divine threatenings in force to-day? Mark xvi. 6. Where in this lesson do we see a good man's counsel? Vs. 11. A good man's gratitude? Vs. 14. A good man's faithfulness? Vs. 15. Are Christians in any danger of departing from God? Heb. iii. 12. What does God say of backsliders? See Golden Text.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, March 28th, 1875.—Review. God's Mercies to Israel.—Josh. xxiv. 1-13.

All pleasure must be bought at the expense of pain; the difference between false pleasure and true is just this: for the true, the price is paid before you enjoy it; for the false, afterwards.—Foster.

The true idea of prayer is well expressed in the Homeric fragment: Asked, and unasked, thy blessings give, O Lord; The evil that we pray for from us ward.

Youths' Department.

THE FIRST FLOWER.

BY E. H. HAYWARD.

Snowdrop hears a whispering: "Waken, waken, it is Spring!"

So, from out her earthy bed, Hastily she lifts her head.

Modestly she looks around— Cold winds sweep the frosty ground;

Not a flower is to be seen, Not a blade of grass is green.

"Ah!" she sighs, "there's some mistake; Who said it is time to wake?"

"Do not fear, my little one, For I called," replies the sun.

"All are praying me to bring Back again the flowers of spring.

"I have tried to melt the snow, But old Winter's loath to go.

"Violets are afraid to start, But I knew your brave, true heart

"Would not shrink from duty's call, So I woke you first of all,

"That your cheerful little face, In this bleak and barren place,

"To impatient hearts may say, 'Fret not, Spring is on the way!'"

—Congregationalist.

HOW TO HELP.

"I wish I was a big woman, to help you, mother," said a little girl.

"Fetch mother's thimble; that will help me," said mother, smiling.

Just as if God meant for little children to wait until they grow up before helping their dear parents! No, no! God gave them two nimble feet on purpose to take steps for mother, and eight fingers and two thumbs on purpose to fetch and bring and carry for her.

A HERO.

"If I were a general," said Freddie, laying down his history, "I should be happy."

"Are you not happy now?" asked Aunt Margaret.

"Oh, yes! but I long to be a hero. It is something to be a hero. Do you not think so?"

"Yes," said Aunt Margaret. "I admire a hero. Shall I tell you how you may become one now, a boy hero, which I think is far more noble than being a general?"

"Yes," said Freddie, eagerly, "do tell me."

"By being master of yourself. Do not give way to angry, wicked feelings. The Bible says, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.' Think of this, and, when tempted to do wrong, fight for the right, and you will be a hero greater than a general.—Children's Friend.

THE THREE BEARS.

Who has not read that story, so wonderful to childhood, of the three bears and the little girl who visited their abode? We remember the eager interest with which we read of her entrance into their house, of her trying the chair of the great bear, of the middle bear, and of the little bear, and choosing the latter; how she explored the house, each time choosing the article which belonged to the little bear, and how, finally, being tired, she strayed into their bed-room, and tried first the bed of the great bear, and not liking that, tried the bed of the middle bear, and still being dissatisfied, tried the bed of the little bear, which was so cosy and nice, that she immediately fell asleep, and did not awake until the presence of the three bears themselves awoke her, when in fright she leaped out of a window and ran to her own home.

We wish to tell our readers of three other bears; namely, bear, overbear, and forbear. The first one leads us to obey the injunction of the gospel, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." If you see any one in affliction, or trouble, enduring hardship or privation, let this little bear exercise itself, and be sympathetic, be kind, be generous, be willing to aid in whatever way you can the needy one, and thus you will be bearing the burdens of another.

Overbear is a very unpleasant one. Nobody loves it, and its possessor is not esteemed so highly for keeping it. We

have seen some men and children who gave evidence of having this bear. Their treatment of others was not meek, kind, and affectionate, but was of an imperious, harsh, overbearing nature, which would lead men to shun such as much as possible, and which would cause children to seek the association of others. We hope if any of the boys and girls, or any others who read this, have such a bear in their keeping, they will keep it no longer, but send it away at once.

Forebear is one that everybody ought to have. Those who have the one last mentioned seldom ever have this one. This one is always prized. When provocations arise, when misunderstandings are produced, when the shortcomings of our friends are made manifest, this bear, instead of leading its possessor into unkindness, or irritability, causes him to be patient, forgiving, tender-hearted, and forbearing.—Uncle Pilgrim.

THE DEACON READYS.

BY REV. DR. CUTLER.

"Ask Deacon Ready; he can do it; he is always willing." This is a very current formula in a certain church that I wot of. If any special job of usefulness is required, he is the man on whose broad and benevolent shoulders the load is pretty sure to be laid. He has earned a good reputation for promptness, for unselfishness, and for never complaining of being made a pack-horse. He would no more think of declining to carry around a subscription-paper, or to visit a poor family on a freezing winter night, or to act as usher at the church doorway when strangers require attention, than a big newfoundlander would decline to plunge into the water and save his young master when drowning. Blessings on Deacon Ready! He is the "joy and crown" of his pastor. He is the staff of life to the prayer-meeting on a rainy night, for he is always sure to be there. He is a prime favourite with those who like to see things done, and are never nimble at doing them. In short, he is the pattern and patron saint of the helpful people. Happy is that pastor who has his quiver full of them.

What is the secret of the usefulness of the Deacon Readys? It is not their wealth. Rich people are sometimes too much occupied with their own business to give time or personal attention to others. It is not their genius. The geniuses are often very dangerous characters in the pulpit, and they are often balky and eccentric when harnessed into the lay labours of a church. I am not sorry that the Lord creates so few geniuses. The helpful people are commonly men of moderate means, moderate talents, and modest character. Talking is not their forte, but working is. They have a knack at it. Philip, Aquila, Dorcas, Lydia, and Luke, all belonged to this guild. They left others to do the shouting; it was their province to do the silent lifting. Probably a large proportion of the best workers in the Apostolic churches are never mentioned at all in the New Testament. It is only now and then that a modest Harlan Page finds a biographer to tell the world the story of his useful life. The great mass of the best deeds that our Lord delights to look upon will never be put into print. But they will read beautifully when "the books are opened" on the last great day.

The secret of usefulness with the helpful people is that they are so unselfish. In this prime grace of Bible religion they copy Christ. He pleased not Himself; He came not to be ministered unto, but to wait on others; He was among His disciples "as one that serveth." Helper is not a name so often given to our Lord Jesus, but He deserves it as truly as that more frequent and adorable name of "Saviour."

This unselfishness of the modest, helpful people makes them willing to do the hard work and the obscure work and disagreeable work for the solid satisfaction of doing good. If they invite an impenitent friend to a prayer-meeting, or talk with him about his soul, they are listened to with respect for their sincerity. When they say a few words in a social meeting, their words weigh a pound apiece, for behind their lips there stands a life. They are the mainstay of the Church in times of revival; they are too solid to volatilize into mere excitement. It is not brain power that gives them weight, it is heart power. They love Jesus, and love their fellow-men, and this gives them a prodigious momentum. They move others by it they constitute the real force in all our churches. The saddest tears I have ever dropped over a coffin were when I looked down into the

silent face of one of my helpers, whose right hand was for the first time motionless.

The number of these helpful folks might be increased immensely. We pastors do not hunt enough after them, and call them out. Thousands do not ask themselves the questions, What was I made for? What am I needed for? If this article stirs some Christian to this self-questioning, then it is not wasted. We cannot all be rich, but we all can be useful. We cannot all be eloquent, but we all can be helpful. We can be "fellow-helpers" with our Lord. We can help to lift up the fallen, and help to steady the feeble, and help carry the load of the burdened, and help take care of the friendless, and help some poor fellow-sinners on the road to heaven. To prepare for such usefulness the best prayer is that God would help us to kill our selfishness, and to consecrate is left to the blessed life living for others.

A VISION OF ANGELS.

BY PROF. W. M. BARBOUR, D. D., BANGOR.

To abate curiosity, let it be said at once that the angels written of were not of the heavenly order. There were seen in Maine, and on this wise. On an early train, one Monday morning, the passengers were found to be workmen of the road, going to their labor on a distant section. Rested by the Sabbath, they were in high spirits, very boisterous, and not very choice in their language and modes of salutation. Thinking they had the car to themselves—for the only general passenger was a wearied preacher muffled up in a corner—it seemed as if nothing could check their rough treatment of one another.

At length, at a way station, a plainly dressed but comely country-woman came in, and out of respect to her, those around her became comparatively quiet. At the next station, a young child, an innocent-looking little girl, was entrusted to the conductor to be carried some distance, and around the young stranger there was also a little circle of peace. At the next station, there was borne in, on pillows, a fellow-workman of the noisy laborers. He had recently been maimed by an accident, and had so far recovered as to be taken home that morning. Suffering had changed the poor man's face, and as he cast his eyes among his fellow-workmen the refinement of his look, and the gentleness of his bearing seemed to radiate upon them a corresponding softening of feature and action. In a few minutes, the rest of the noisy company were subdued. See them, by twos and threes, go up to the invalid. See them adjust their dress, look if their hands were clean, lighten their steps, soften their voices, and look their kindest into the wan and sunken countenance. Hear them inventing the cheeriest remarks, and expressing the most loving solicitudes; in fact, in every word and action, behave like regenerated beings. Sympathy, gentleness, grace flowed among them as abundantly as bluntness, force and vulgarity had done but half an hour before. While the sufferer was in the car, no homeward nurse could outdo them in the delicacy of their attentions. Not a profane word, not a rude jest, not a blow, nor a scuffle, not a hearty laugh even, was heard among them, till, with a tenderness like a mother's, they took their wounded comrade in their arms, and bore him off the train.

"There," said the observer in the corner, "there is the mission of many a sufferer. To subdue one class of emotions, to bestir another, to elevate, to refine, to beautify our life, pain has a place in the economy of mortality."

"What has changed this company's behavior?" Thus he asked and answered to himself. The new influences coming in among them. "And what were they that like angels of peace changed men to their own peaceful image?" Beauty in the person of the fair woman; innocence in the person of the little girl, and suffering in the person of the wounded man. And, owing perhaps to the material wrought upon, in this case suffering was more powerful than beauty and innocence combined. And yet that sufferer had no idea that he was an angel of softening to all within his influence.

Should these lines meet the eye of any sons or daughters of affliction, let them give it as their message, "Son, daughter, be of good cheer. Not for ourselves are we always smitten. By the blow upon you, God may be doing more unto others than you can ask or think." As seen in this vision of common life, suffering has as high an angelic dignity, and as strong an angelic power, and may we not add, as pure an angelic origin, as beauty and purity themselves, whom all allow to be messengers of good, and only good, to man. Forget not, sufferer, that the angel of Gethsemane came from the same place as the angels of the Advent, and the angels of the Resurrection. And, having surrendered their common trust, as messengers of consolation, joy and triumph, they are even now in the same heaven, bowing before the same throne, radiant with the same glory!—Congregationalist.