

The Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N.S., MAY 26, 1875.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, May 30th, 1875.—The Death of Eli.—1 Sam. iv. 12-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." Proverbs xix. 18.

ANALYSIS.—I. Tidings of defeat. Vs. 12, 13. II. Eli's anxiety. Vs. 14, 15. III. Answer of the Messenger. Vs. 16, 17. IV. Eli's death. Vs. 18.

Eli was both judge and priest. He resided at Shiloh. He was a man of eminent piety, yet sorrowfully indulgent of wickedness in his family, because of which, utter ruin fell upon his house. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were characters "of great and instructive sinfulness," and a warning to all of God's servants against covetousness and sensuality. But all the fatherly censure they received was in substance this: "Why do you so, my sons? It is no good report I hear of you. My sons, do so no more."

EXPOSITION.—Introductory.—The battle, of whose disastrous issue our lesson informs us, is in vs. 1 so connected with Samuel's words of prophecy, as to suggest, if not imply, that it was undertaken by Israel in consequence of those words. Our last lesson in Judges showed to us Israel still under the cruel domination of the Philistines, and thus do we find them now. The battle was intended to break their power. Ebenezer [stone of help] is a name given to the place by Samuel, in memory of a victory over the Philistines some time after this. After a first repulse by the Philistines, the Hebrews caused the ark to be brought from the sanctuary in Shiloh without divine permission, under charge of the corrupt, godless priests, Hophni and Phinehas, and in the superstitious notion that the ark of itself had some magic power, apart from Jehovah, to help and save.

Verse 12.—There ran a man of Benjamin. Of the tribe of Benjamin. He may have been appointed by Eli for this service, or possibly was a self-constituted messenger. The distance run was not far from twenty miles, northward. Out of the army. The engagement. Came to Shiloh the same day. A note on the man's speed. The battle was probably in the forenoon. With his clothes rent and earth upon his head. In accordance with the prevalent custom of the East to express sorrow, distress. The loose outer robe, or tunic, was rent from the top, downwards. On the custom, see Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34; 2 Sam. iii. 31; Matt. xxvi. 65. For examples of sprinkling dust or ashes on the person, see 2 Sam. xiii. 19; xv. 32; Job ii. 12; Rev. xvii. 19. This condition of the man would show to the eye, as did his voice to the ear, that a great disaster had befallen Israel.

Verse 13.—And when he came. Lo Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside, watching. In eager anxiety for the first tidings from the army. For his heart trembled for the ark of God. Notice; not for his sons, not for the army, but for the ark, his heart trembled. He knew that Jehovah's favor was Israel's hope and salvation. He knew, too, that his sons had no right to remove from the sanctuary the ark, unbidden by Jehovah, against all precedent, and doubtless against his own earnest, unheeded protest, and that, therefore, they had insulted Jehovah by its removal. He remembered, too, the dark prophecy which came to him through Samuel on the night of our last lesson. iii. 11-18. Besides, he was the high priest, and to him specially belonged the thought and care of it. When the man came and told it, all the city cried out. In horror, terror and despair, the glory of the sanctuary was the ark, and the glory of the ark was Jehovah. And now Jehovah and the ark had gone. They were likely to think with Hophni, Phinehas, and the rest, that with the ark in the camp Israel was sure to conquer the Philistines. Hence, from exultant hope they were at once plunged into the depths of despair.

Verse 14.—When Eli heard the noise of the crying. He thus seems to have been sitting alone. All the "city" or "village" would rush out to meet the messenger along the road to the south, and thus Eli would be left alone in the rear. What meaneth [omit "meaneth"] the noise of this tumult. Asked perchance of a kind

friend who staid behind to care for him, or some other infirm one like himself, unable to go out with the many. The answer, however, was given by the messenger, for he thoughtfully made straight and swiftly for Eli.

Verse 15.—Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim that he could not see. He was too old and feeble, and too blind also, to go with the rest. It explains also why he could not prevent the removal of the ark.

Verse 16.—The man [that is, the messenger] said unto Eli I am he that came out of the army. He is giving tidings which he knows to be true, because an eyewitness. I fled to-day out of the army. The last and latest news. And he [Eli] said, What is there done, my son? He shrank from giving what he knew would be a terrible blow to the venerable father in Israel.

Verse 17.—The messenger has nothing but bad news to give—but he begins with that which will least shock. Israel is fled before the Philistines. Defeat. But still further, and worse—There hath been also a great slaughter among the people. But grief on grief, sorest grief to Eli. Thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead. THINE, ALSO THINE. Sons beloved, indulged, ruined, and their death all the darker, sadder, for that ruin. Both sons dead; and Eli knew that this affliction had for him a meaning. There is something worse dreaded, And the ark of God is taken.

Verse 18.—And it came to pass when he made mention of the ark. Not before. Till then, hope had kept alive, faint though it was. Till then, it was as though the news were not news. The point of interest had not been reached. But now it is reached. It is the ark, and that is taken. This stroke killed both hope and him. He fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died. The news caused him to fall. The fall caused his instantaneous death. Not as though God had disowned Eli. It was not rejecting him as a servant; but it was a chastisement, showing God's disapprobation of his mode of dealing with his sons, and to guard that service against like profanation in the future. He had judged Israel forty years. Eli, it seems, became judge when fifty-eight years old, and was judge while the Philistines vexed Israel.

QUESTIONS.—Against whom had Israel gone out in battle? Vs. 1. Who were the Philistines? Ans. The longest continued and deadliest enemies of Israel, dwelling on the sea coast southwest of Palestine. After their first defeat, to what did Israel superstitiously look for victory? Vs. 3, 4. Did the ark of God save them? Vs. 11.

Vs. 12. Why run to Shiloh? Why with "clothes rent" and "earth upon his head"?

Vs. 13. Was there anything peculiar about this "seat"? Why does it not say that Eli trembled for the safety of the sons?

Vs. 16. What do the words "I fled to-day" show?

Vs. 17. What is the least sad news in this verse to Eli? What the more sad? What the saddest of all?

Vs. 18. What phase of Eli's character does this verse show? In spite of his eminent piety, what was his great fault? Chap. iii. 13. Was the doom of Eli and his sons foretold? Chap. ii. 27-36. What lesson does this teach? Ans. That parental indulgence is very harmful.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 6th, 1875.—Samuel the Judge.—1 Sam. vii. 5-12.

Youths' Department.

THE TWO BILLS.

A FABLE FOR THE CHILDREN.

Two bills were waiting in the bank for their turn to go out into the world. One was a little bill, only one dollar; the other was a big bill, a thousand-dollar bill.

While lying there side by side, they fell a-talking about their usefulness. The dollar-bill murmured out—

"Ah, if I were as big as you, what good I would do! I could move in such high places, and people would be so careful of me wherever I should go! Everybody would admire me, and want to take me home with them; but, small as I am, what good can I do? Nobody cares much for me. I am too little to be of any use."

"Ah, yes! that is so," said the thousand-dollar bill; and it haughtily gathered up its well-trimmed edges that were lying next the little bill, in conscious superiority. "That is so," it repeated. "If you were as great as I am, a thousand times bigger than you are, then you might hope to do some good in the world." And its

face smiled a wrinkle of contempt for the little dollar-bill.

Just then the cashier comes, takes the little, murmuring bill, and kindly gives it to a poor widow.

"God bless you!" she cries, as with a smiling face she receives it. "My dear hungry children can now have some bread."

A thrill of joy ran through the little bill as it was folded up in the widow's hand; and it whispered, "I may do some good, if I am small." And when it saw the bright faces of her fatherless children, it was very glad that it could do a little good.

Then the little dollar-bill began its journey of usefulness. It went first to the baker's for bread, then to the miller's, then to the farmer's, then to the laborer's, then to the doctor's, then to the minister's; and wherever it went, it gave pleasure, adding something to their comfort and joy.

At last, after a long, long pilgrimage of usefulness among every sort of people, it came back to the bank again, crumpled, defaced, ragged, softened, by its daily use. Seeing the thousand-dollar bill lying there, with scarcely a wrinkle or a finger-mark upon it, it exclaims—"Pray, sir, and what has been your mission of usefulness?"

The big bill sadly replies, "I have been from safe to safe among the rich where few could see me, and they were afraid to let me go out far, lest I should be lost. Few indeed are they whom I have made happy by my mission." The little dollar-bill said, "It is better to be small, and go among the multitudes doing good, than to be so great as to be imprisoned in the safes of the few." And it rested satisfied with its lot.

MORAL.—The doing well of little everyday duties makes one the most useful and happy.—Well Spring.

Here is another fable or parable.

A MYSTERY ON THE OCEAN BOTTOM.

BY JAMES TODD.

Far down in the deep waters of the ocean there are mountains and rocks, and valleys and caves, just as there are up in our world.

Sometimes the sailor drops the lead attached to a cord, and it will sink down not far, and then again at a little distance, it will sink down, down very far. In the first place it fell upon a mountain, and then in a valley. Were the great ocean dried up, we should see wonders there.

At the foot of one of these mountains in the ocean, there was a kind of tea-party met, consisting of Mrs. Eel, Mrs. Lobster, Mrs. Cod, Mrs. Shrimp, Mrs. Flounder, and Mrs. Nautilus. The fact was, a curious event had happened, and they were met to discuss it. A long, small thing had come creeping down the mountain and across the valley, and along it went on the ocean's bottom, so long that they could see no end to it either way. Gently it came down and lay still on the bottom of the ocean.

"Mrs. Eel," says Mrs. Lobster, "is not this some relation of yours? It looks more like one of the eel family than anything else."

"I would have you to know," said Mrs. Eel, squirming and twisting herself every way, "that an eel has a head and a tail and fins; and don't you see this has none? An eel keeps moving; and don't you see this don't move at all? How could you think it was an eel?"

"I thought it was a worm," said Mrs. Cod, "and I tried to bite it. Whew! it almost broke my teeth out. It's nothing that I can eat; though you know, Mrs. Lobster, I can eat a whole family of lobsters if they are not too old."

"I tell you what I think," said little Mrs. Shrimp. "It's a thing for us shrimps to creep on and cling to, and under which to lay our eggs and raise our young."

"It's very plain," said Mrs. Flounder, "it is a scratcher, just for us flounders to swim over and scrape our breasts on."

"You are all wrong," said Mrs. Nautilus. "It's a thinking machine."

"A what?" exclaimed all together.

"A thinking machine, I tell you. There are creatures that live up out of the water who think a great deal. They send messages, instead of going to carry them. They are curious creatures, and sometimes when I have been up on the top of the water I have seen them. They sail about in great vessels of wood, and when at home have creatures to draw them round."

"Why, what fables you are telling us. Do you expect that we shall believe that creatures can live out of the water?"

"Yes, they do. And instead of fins

and tails they have two legs, with which they walk."

"A very likely story, said Mrs. Lobster. "When even I, skillful as I am, can't walk on less than a dozen legs, how can they walk on two? What kind of fins have they?"

"They don't have fins; they have arms and hands instead. They seem to be full of thought. Now this machine, so long that you, Mrs. Lobster, could not creep to the other end of it, and send thoughts or messages through to the other end in a moment; and thus they talk to each other hundreds and thousands of miles apart. Even now, while we are looking at it, they are sending their thoughts through it."

"That I don't believe," says Mrs. Cod. "Neither do I," says Mrs. Eel.

"Why not?"

"Because we can't see any thought passing through it."

"No; nor hear it."

"No; nor smell it."

"No; nor feel it. Now you don't think we are such fools as to believe a thing which we can't see, nor hear, nor smell, nor feel, do you? You don't expect us to believe there are creatures who can live out of water, and move without fins, and think all along the bottom of the ocean. Oh, Mrs. Nautilus, we are proud to know we are above being deceived by such stories. We don't believe there is any world but our ocean world. Pray what kind of light do they have up there?"

"Oh, it is stronger and purer, and more beautiful than ours. Compared with ours it is consolidated light. It's a more glorious state than ours, and the creatures who live there and think so much, are far higher in their nature than we."

"Well, Mrs. Nautilus, that will do for one day. We may as well break up our party. We can't associate with one who tries to make us believe what we can't understand. We know too much for such deception."

At that Mrs. Lobster opened her great claw as if she would crush poor Mrs. Nautilus, and Mrs. Cod rolled her eyes and snapped her great jaws. Mrs. Eel twisted and darted here and there, and Mrs. Shrimp swelled, and Mrs. Flounder turned her eyes and looked sideways.

Alas, poor creatures! just as wise as the Sadducees and such like people, who say, "There is neither angel nor spirit," nor a higher state than this, because they cannot comprehend it.

THE PATIENT ELEPHANT.

An elephant in Calcutta had a disease in his eyes. For three days he had been completely blind. His owner, an engineer officer, asked the doctor if he could do anything to relieve the poor animal. The doctor said he would try the nitrate of silver, which was the remedy commonly applied to similar diseases in the human eye.

The large animal was ordered to lie down, and at first, on the application of the remedy, raised a most extraordinary roar at the acute pain which it occasioned. The effect, however, was wonderful. The eyes were in a manner restored, and the animal could partially see. The next day, when he was brought, and heard the doctor's voice, he lay down of himself, placed his enormous head on one side, curled up his trunk, drew in his breath just like a man about to endure an operation, gave a sigh of relief when it was over, and then, by trunk and gesture, evidently wished to express his gratitude."

THE BRIGHT SIDE.

Look on the bright side. It is the right side. The times may be hard, but it will make them no easier to wear a gloomy and sad countenance. It is the sunshine, and not the cloud, that makes the flower. The sky is blue ten times where it is black once. You have troubles; so have others.

None are free from them. Trouble gives sinew and tone to life—fortitude and courage to man. That would be a dull sea, and the sailors would never get skill, where there was nothing to disturb the surface of the ocean. What though things look a little dark? The lane will turn, and night will end in broad day. There is more virtue in a sunbeam than in a whole hemisphere of cloud and gloom.

THE MOMENT.

Thy past is a dream
And thy future likewise;
Snatch the moment, 'twixt nothing
And nothing that lies.

LOVE LIGHTENS LABOR.

One morning I found Dora busy at her ironing-table, smoothing the towels and stockings.

"Isn't it hard for the little arms?" I asked.

A look like sunshine came into her face, as she glanced towards her mother, who was rocking the baby.

"It isn't hard work when I do it for mamma," she said softly.

How true it is that love makes labor sweet.

A CHIVALROUS COW.

The cow has not hitherto been suspected of much neatness of instinct or liveliness of affection but an incident developed at the Petty Sessions held recently in an English town tends to show that this mild, dull animal is sometimes endowed with considerable feeling and sagacity. In the case in question, a farmer's wife was assaulted by her husband in a field where was a cow that the woman had greatly petted. On seeing the man beating his wife, tearing her hair and clothes, and otherwise maltreating her, the cow came charging up the field, and attacked the man with such ferocity that he was glad to retreat summarily. The cow then took up a defensive position by the woman's side, and stood perfectly still while the latter struggled to her feet and supported herself by leaning on its flank until she had sufficiently recovered to take refuge from her husband in flight. It may be taken as additional evidence of the uncommon good sense of the cow, that it had always manifested a strong antipathy to the brute who could descend so low as to beat his wife.

THE POWER OF SACRED SONG.

Music laden with words of grace and beauty, has power to affect the roughest hearts. This is illustrated by a story told of the Rev. Dr. Trafton and a stage-ride he had some years ago among the lumbermen of Maine:

He got into the stage crowded full of the rough fellows, in a dark, stormy night, the stage "in a perfect tempest of confused sounds of hilarious jollification." After the lumbermen had sung all their songs till they were hoarse, they insisted that the new comer should sing. He objected at first, but as the remonstrances of the lumbermen grew dangerous, consented on condition that they should keep still while he sang, and not blame his selection. To this the company, some with oaths, agreed. Thereupon the singer began with "He dies! the Friend of sinners dies!" sung to the tune of "Bonny Doon." When the tune was completed there was a call for more—with the oaths left out. And the minister got a lodgment in the men's hearts.

REMINDERS.

An Ohio superintendent sends this circular to Sunday school absentees:

"We have missed you from your place for several weeks. We are sorry to have you stay away. Won't you come as regularly as you can hereafter, beginning next Sunday? Don't let anything but sickness or absence from town keep you from Sunday school, will you?
Affectionately, Your Superintendent."

"To how many people did your pastor preach last Sabbath?" asked an emulating Christian of his neighbor. "Well, I should say about six." "Six! What do you mean? What went wrong?" "O, nothing went wrong but the sermon; it went over the heads of nearly all, though I think about a half dozen caught some of it." The gentleman was sarcastic, but he was teaching a valuable lesson.

MR. SANKEY'S SINGING.—The Leisure Hour says:—

With regard to Mr. Sankey's part in the services, a stiffly orthodox divine said he thought it rather "irreverent to sing the gospel." The reply of an aged minister was happy and decisive. "As to that, my friend, remember that the gospel was sung before it was preached: when the angels sang, 'Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good-will to men.'"

A Western editor, noticing the present of a silver cup to a brother editor, says: "He needs no cup. He can drink from any vessel that contains liquor, whether the neck of a bottle, the mouth of a pickle-jar, the spile of a keg, or the bung of a barrel."