

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, Sept. 17th, 1876.—A Godly Life.—Eccles. xii. 1-14.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 1-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Godliness is profitable unto all things."—1 Tim. iv. 8.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Genesis xxxvii. 23-36. Tuesday, Genesis xxxix. 1-6. Wednesday, Mark xi. 13-22. Thursday, Matthew x. 16-28. Friday, 2 Cor. v. 1-11. Saturday, Isaiah xl. 1-8. Sunday, Mark iv. 1-25.

ANALYSIS.—I. Appeal to the young. Vs. 1. II. Troubles of old age. Vs. 2, 5. III. Signs of dissolution. Vs. 6. IV. Dust and spirit. Vs. 7. V. Practical conclusions. Vs. 8-14.

EXPOSITION.—This book contains a discussion which "may be reduced to three propositions, every one of which, when properly reflected on, yields strong proof of a future state of rewards and punishments. First, no labor or trouble of men in this world can ever be so profitable as to produce in them a lasting contentment and thorough satisfaction of mind. Secondly, earthly goods and whatever we can acquire by our utmost labor and trouble in this world are so far from making us lastingly happy, that they may be looked upon even as real obstacles to our ease, quiet and tranquility. Thirdly, men know not what is or is not truly advantageous to them, because they are either ignorant or unmindful of that which must come to pass after they are dead. Therefore, any one may conclude that there must be a state of true and solid happiness for man, unless God, who is allowed to have made them what they are, to have implanted in them that strong desire for happiness which often makes them unhappy in this world, and to have absolute command of their fate, be absurdly supposed to have acted whimsically in their formation, and to act so still in the dispensations of providence. Thus from all these propositions, and especially the last, the preacher infers that we must seek for happiness beyond the grave."

Verse 1.—Remember now thy Creator. The word translated now does not refer to time, but is a conjunction, usually translated and, sometimes also therefore, but. The address to the "young man," enforcing the lesson of all that went before, was begun in xi. 9, and is in this chapter continued, and hence the conjunction. The exhortation is to keep and carry about a deep and controlling sense of God, and of him as "Creator."

This points back to Genesis i and ii, and implies God's absolute ownership of us. In the days of thy youth. The address is to the "young man," xi. 9, and the sentiment often recurs in Scripture. Proverbs viii. 17; xxii. 6. Religion, is needed, not merely "to die by," but to form the manhood of man. Evil days, etc. Referring especially to old age, which at least is a time of discomforts, but which to the irreligious sensualist, who has no good save the enjoyment of sense, is a time of evil.

Verse 2.—From this to verse 5 we have a description of old age, the most beautiful and admired that ever has been written or spoken. While the sun, etc. In Palestine there are in reality but two seasons, summer, that is sun-ner, the time of the sun, and winter, that is, wind-er, the time of the wind, or of storm, rain and wind going together—the fair season and the rainy season. Clouds return after the rain. That is, rain follows on rain in winter, without settled fair weather, like the succession of infirmities and pains in old age.

Verse 3.—Man's body is often called "the house in which he lives," and in Scripture "the temple of God," or of "the Holy Ghost." 1 Corinthians iii. 16, 17; vi. 19. Here it is compared to a house, or rather a palace. In the day. At the period, that is, of old age. The keepers of the house. Usually and most naturally understood of the arms, by which one wards off attacks, and defends himself. They tremble through feebleness. The strong men. Understood of the legs, which like the arms lose strength, and can scarce support the weight placed on them. The grinders. The teeth. The grinders or mills in the east, are hand-mills, consisting of an upper and lower stone, usually oper-

ated by women. Matt. 24. 41. Those that look out of the windows. Age dims, or wholly darkens the eyes, so that though still at the windows trying to look, it is only trying.

Verse 4.—The doors. Not plural, doors, but dual, a double, or two-leaved door, or gate. The mouth, with its upper and lower lip, like the two leaves or folds of a gate. Compare Psalm cxli. 3.; Mich. iii. 7; Job xli. 14. In the streets. That is, opening on the streets the outer door or gate. Fitly is the mouth thus compared. The loss of teeth brings the lips close together. Silence so reigns that a sound so slight as that of a sparrow startles and rouses the inmate. The daughters of music. Either songs, or singers. In festal days the mansion resounded with music. All this is no more. There is silence in the "lone deserted hall." "The daughters of music" songs, others explain them of our vocal organs.

Verse 5.—Afraid of that which is high. The hill is to an old man a formidable object to mount. Fears in the way. How the old dread to make journeys, imagining, and not without reason, mishaps; while to the young travel is full of charm. The almond tree shall flourish. Usually understood of the "hoary head of age," as resembling the white, or nearly white blossom of the almond tree, which "bears its blossoms in the midst of winter, and on a naked leafless stem." The grasshopper, or locust, he takes to be a burden, not because of its weight, as is usually understood, but an article of food. Long home. Literally, "everlasting house," or as we say "his final resting place," but not as implying that there is to be no resurrection. The mourners. Hired mourners were wont to be employed at funerals.

Verse 6.—Silver cord. "The silver cord of life," by some referred to the spinal cord. The golden bowl. The vessel in which was the oil that fed "the [lamp and] light of life." The pitcher, etc. Whether the heart whence flow the blood through the system is the fountain, or more generally the source of animal life in all that supports and nourishes, is uncertain. In either case the pitcher is the medium for making available the fountain's waters, bringing it to use. The wheel, etc. by the cistern wheel the bucket was lowered and raised.

Verse 7.—Then shall the dust [body], etc. Here, as in the New Testament, the distinction between the body and the soul, and between their destination, is sharply and decisively drawn. So must it be by us if we will not become brutal in doctrine and life.

Verse 8.—The grand burden of the book, and true in the view intended, viz., provided one make this world his all, and have no hope in God. How naturally comes in the refrain here after this view of infirmity of age and death's victory. The Preacher. That is, Solomon.

Verse 9.—Many proverbs. See 1 Kings iv. 32.

Verse 10.—That which was written was upright, even words of truth.

Verse 11.—Nails fastened [planted], etc. Here is a testimony on the power of divine truth reminding us of Hebrews iv. 12. Given from one Shepherd. The preacher is a shepherd under the one great Shepherd, and the word which is preached is the bread of heaven given by the great Shepherd for all his flock, and all the flocks or assemblies.

Verse 13.—The conclusion, etc. The grand lesson of all this book, and of all right thought of life. Fear God, etc. With a child's loving fear, confiding and obedient reverence, sweet and saving. The whole duty of man. Literally, "the whole of man." This makes man man—gives true manhood and true worth.

Verse 14.—God shall bring, etc. A clearer statement of the future state, and of the relation of the present to the future life is not to be found even in the New Testament.

QUESTIONS.—What does the Hebrew title of the book from which our lesson is taken signify? What preacher is referred to? The sun of Solomon's life rose bright; how did it set? Does the Bible anywhere hide the sins of its leading characters?

Vs. 1. What better safeguard than piety can you think of? What better preparative for manhood and age? Proverbs xvi. 31.

Vs. 2-6. Go through these finely-wrought images of the troubles and infirmities of old age and apply them one by one.

Vs. 7. Was Solomon a materialist? Was the Saviour? Matt. x. 28. Was Paul? 2 Cor. v. 1-10.

Vs. 8. What then does Solomon mean by "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity?"

Vs. 13. What is the promise of godliness? 1 Timothy iv. 8. If a young man or woman is godly, how is their godliness apparent? Ps. cxix. 63.

—Baptist Teacher.

Sunday, Sept. 24th, 1876.—Review.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

The Golden Geese.

I wish I had a goose that laid golden eggs!" said Norah, throwing down her book and clasping her hands energetically.

"Don't talk nonsense!" said her mother.

"What would'st do with the gold, lass?" said the father.

"I would buy myself a white frock, and a blue sash, and a hat like the squire's daughter; a silk gown for the mother, and a coat with a velvet collar for you to wear on Sundays, father."

"That would take only take part of a golden egg," returned father. "Go on, lass, and then we shall know all thee wants."

Norah drew closer to her father, and looked gravely up in his face.

"A donkey-cart for mother to go to market in; a carpet for the room, curtains for the windows, lots of beautiful flowers and fruit in the garden, and nothing to do. I should sell the eggs, and get so much money that you never need do any more work."

"Thank thee lass, thank thee; it sounds very grand. Wife, dost hear what Norah is going to give us?"

"Aye, if wishes were horses, beggars would ride!" returned the mother. "I wonder at thee, father, for encouraging the lass in her folly. Come, Norah, get the table ready for supper, the lads will be in from the fields before long, and they'll be hungry enough, I fear say."

Scarcely had she spoken when the gate swung open, and the two lads appeared, one of them carrying something very carefully in his hat.

"A present for you, Norah! Guess what it is in three guesses. Now!"

Norah sprang forward. "Is it a bird?"

"No!"

"One of Mrs. Lovell's plum-cakes?"

"No!"

"A goose's egg, perhaps," said the father, laughing.

"O you should'nt have spoken!" said Tom. "I wanted Norah to guess. But it's not one egg. Farmer Lovell has sent her six eggs; and he says if she will get the old hen to sit upon them she will have six as fine young goslings as need to be."

"Why, Norah, your in luck," said the father; "and it will be hard, if out of six geese there should not be one to lay golden eggs for us."

"Golden eggs!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

"Ah, lad, thee dost not know all the fine things that are coming to us," returned father, laughing; whilst Norah's cheeks grew red, and the mother said, "Father's making fun, lad."

The old hen sat upon the eggs, and in due time the goslings straggled forth, and Norah began to build castles in the air. One sunny afternoon Norah sat knitting by the river-side, whilst her geese were swimming and diving to their heart's content, when Farmer Lovell passed by. Norah jumped up.

"Aren't they beauties?" said she, pointing to her geese, "I can never thank you enough for them."

"Make good use of them," said the farmer, patting her on the shoulder; "but that I'm sure you will do; the daughter of a good father and mother need not be told that." And he went his way. And Norah fell to thinking of what he had said, and as she did so the visions of blue and pink ribbons, and stylish hats, vanished away, and a sudden sense of responsibility of having possessions of her own began to press upon her.

"I think the geese are making me wise," said she, unconsciously speaking aloud.

"Then they will be golden geese," answered a voice at her side.

"O, father! Did you hear what I was saying?"

"Only a bit of it."

"It's a great thing to have property," said Norah, "and to know what to do with it makes one feel older, and it's a weight as well as a pleasure."

"Why, lass," said her father, "the geese have taught thee a lesson thy mother and I failed to teach thee!"

The older and fatter the geese grew, the more important Norah felt. She and Tom had many consultations as Martinmas drew nigh, and at length it was decided that the time had come for the geese to be sold.

"I'm sorry to part with them, Tom, but they must go. I must have the money."

"What for?"

But Norah screwed up her mouth and shook her head. She had her own plans, but she was not going to tell them.

"I wonder if they would bring seven shillings apiece," said she.

"Here's farmer Lovell coming, maybe he can tell us."

"I don't like to ask him," answered Norah.

But Farmer Lovell anticipated the question, for his first words were "Well, Norah, if you're willing to sell your geese, I've got a good customer for you."

Norah looked up, her eyes half-filled with tears, for now that it came to the point, she found that she was really very fond of her geese.

"Eight shillings each," continued Farmer Lovell; "it's a high price, and, though poultry's dear, you are not likely to get such an offer again."

"She'll sell them," said Tom.

"Let your sister speak for herself."

"Yes, thank you; I have made up my mind to sell them," said Norah, "and I'm much obliged to you for"—and here Norah burst out crying.

"What a queer girl you are!" said Tom!

But Farmer Lovell patted her on the shoulders, saying, "I understand, child, and I'll send for them to-night."

That evening the geese had an extra feed of green meat from Norah's hand, an extra pat on the head for good-bye; and when Norah went to bed at night she put her two pounds eight shillings under her pillow, and cried herself to sleep.

"What will she do with it?" asked Tom.

"You'll surely not let her spend it all as she pleases," said the mother.

"Leave her alone," said the father; "the golden geese have been talking to her." The mother lifted up her hands, but said nothing.

The next morning Norah came down to breakfast pale and quiet, and ate her bread and milk in silence, and when her brothers had gone off to work, she sat down beside her father, and asked, "What's the fare to Cloverdale?"

"Cloverdale! What put Cloverdale into thy head, lass? Art going to be a traveller? Let me see, third class would be about ten shillings, I fancy."

"Ten shillings there and ten shillings back, and ten more would be thirty.—Father, I want you to go to Cloverdale, and bring grandmother to see us all."

"Grandmother said in her letter she should like to see you once again before she died; and as I minded the geese down by the river, I thought of Joseph in the land of Egypt, and how his old father longed to see him; but I knew that you could not afford to send for grandmother as Joseph sent for Jacob; and then all at once it came to me that the geese would manage it for us."

The father was silent for a while; but he drew Norah closer to him, and kissed her; then he spoke. "Dost hear the lass, mother? Wasn't I right? And haven't the geese been as good as if they'd laid golden eggs for her?"

"Better," replied the mother. "Thou art a good lass, my daughter, and thy father shall go and satisfy the desire of his heart—to see his mother again in the land of the living. It will do us more good than if thou couldst buy a dozen silk gowns and fine coats."

And the father went, and the grandmother came; and as they sat round the blazing fire, full of happiness and joy, no heart was lighter and happier than Norah's: and when her grandmother laid her hand upon her head, and said fondly, "Bless thee, my child, for this great happiness; the remembrance of thy good deed will return to thee again, and again, like refreshing waters!" Norah felt as if one of the patriarchs had pronounced a blessing.

"Amen!" said the father. "The golden geese have done their work well!"

—Watchman.

How to understand Poetry.

Sometimes a boy or girl says, "I should like to understand poetry; I do like to read it and repeat it, but I cannot always tell what it means."

Dear children, some things go under the title of poetry which are incomprehensible to young and old, to wise and foolish alike. But the way to understand true poetry—that of nature, at least—is to love the beauty of which it is the picture and the song. The best poetry is simple and natural as life itself; and by listening to the sweet voices which are always floating unheeded on the air, you will feel what is through all your being. Only keep eye and heart open, and never let it be possible for you to scorn or neglect the least thing that God has made.

Look for poetry, and you will find it everywhere—in the fairy-cup moss under your feet, in the woodland foot-paths, in the song of the robin at your window in the morning, in the patter of the rain on the roof, in the first rosy cloud on the horizon at dawn, and the last that fades out in the west at sunset. For poetry is written all over the earth by a Divine hand, before it can get into books.

The Creator is the great poet. All that is beautiful to eye or ear or heart is His hand-writing. Wherever a bud opens, a rivulet slips along its pebbly path, or a leaf-shadow dances in the sunshine, there He has written a poem which He meant should be read with delight by every passer-by.—Lucy Larcom, in St. Nicholas.

The Baby.

Who knows not the beautiful group of babe and mother, sacred in nature, sacred also in the religious associations of half the globe! Welcome to the parents is the puny little struggler, strong in his weakness, his little arms more irresistible than the soldier's, his lips touched with persuasion which Chatham and Pericles in manhood had not. The small despot asks so little that all nature and reason are on his side. His ignorance is more charming than all knowledge, and his little sins more bewitching than all virtue. All day between his three or four sleeps he coos like a pigeon-house, sputters and crows, and puts on faces of importance; and when he fasts, the Pharisee fails not to sound his trumpet before him. Out of blocks, thread-spools, cards and checkers, he will build his pyramids with the gravity of a Palladio. With an acoustic apparatus of whistle and rattle, he explores the laws of sound. But chiefly, like his senior countrymen, the young American studies new and speedier modes of transportation. Mistrusting the cunning of his small legs, he wishes to ride on the neck and shoulders of all flesh. The small enchanter nothing can withstand—no seniority of age, no gravity of character, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandsires, grandmas—all fall an easy prey; he conforms to nobody, all conform to him, all caper and make mouths, and babble and chirp to him. On the strongest shoulder he rides, and pulls the hair of laureled heads.—Emerson.

Mr. Bradlaugh the infidel, having lectured at Deptford, was replied to by a well known resident, who contrasted the work that Christians were doing with that of the Secularists, and said: "I have been out often between the hours of midnight and daybreak, searching for poor friendless lads, with a view to rescue and bring them to our Boy's Home at Deptford, and I have visited some of the lowest lodging houses in London, and there I have seen the Scripture-reader engaged in his work for God; and as I have seen the female missionary dealing with those of her own sex who had fallen, and seeking to save them from a life of misery. But never," said he, "have I seen an infidel out at these hours ready and willing to afford even temporal help to those who were in need."

"Have you heard my last song?" asked a music teacher of a gruff critic. "I hope so," was the reply.

Dean Stanley and several bishops of the Church of England are about to establish a weekly paper, to be called the University Review. It will be devoted to education topics and interests.