

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Sunday, Sept. 10th, 1876.—The Excellent Woman.—Pro. xxxi 10-31.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 23-30.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"This woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did." Acts ix. 36.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Proverbs xv. Tuesday, Luke vii. 36-50. Wednesday, John xii. 1-9. Thursday, Acts xvi. 8-15. Friday, Prov. xxii. Saturday, Ephesians v. 21-33. Sunday, Acts ix. 36-43.

ANALYSIS.—I. Within the home. Vs. 10-22. II. Outside of the home. Vs. 23-31.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 10.—Who can find, etc. Literally, "a woman of strength." The strength is here that of all womanly merit, in both moral character, and practical business capacity. But the chief point of the question as the last member of the shows, was not only the scarcity of good women, but their worth especially as wives. See verse 29. A man will range over continents and seas to get money; but a good wife is worth more to him than gold and precious stones.

Verse 11.—Safely trust. That is, confide. This, as the connection, and especially the next clause shows, is with reference to her management of the important affairs committed to her. Spoil. The word so translated means this first, and then gain, acquired, by peaceful industry.

Verse 12.—She will do him good, etc. A capital motto for a newly-married wife to take and enthrone in her heart. The idea of the family is that of a complete oneness of interest, and even life—one heart, one purpose, one line of motion, one result. The true idea also is that the husband, and not the wife, is the head, and that as a rule she is primarily his helpmeet, not he hers. This is both nature and Scripture, and its realization brings to man and woman their highest honor and enjoyment.

Verse 13.—She seeketh wool, etc. Principles abide, but their expression changes. Those were the days of "Homespun." Even the Emperor Augustus wore only garments made by his wife or sister, or daughter. Our factories have changed the forms of home industry, but have not done away with the industry itself or at least, the need of it. There is for every woman care and labor in the household, of hand and heart and brain. What it shall be her position and her capabilities will determine, it must be something, an earnest and absorbing business. No true woman wants simply to be carried. She worketh willingly. In this "willingly" is the charm.

Verse 14.—She is like, etc. The second member is intended to explain the first. Her industry enables her to exchange her fabrics for food, and thus to obtain the choicest, even the products of foreign countries. She thus "brings her food from afar" by this exchange.

Verse 15.—She riseth also, etc. The custom in Palestine, and adjacent countries, was and is to begin labor earlier than with us, because of the greater heat of the climate. The New Testament makes frequent reference to this. "Households" and "maidens" are those of her own family, and the hired servants. The word "portion" is by many understood to mean tasks but it is rather the allowance of food, as in xxx. 8.

Verse 16.—She considereth a field, etc. Not as though going forward and taking the lead in such business without regard to her husband, but partly as having such admirable judgment as to be his best adviser, or even to be preferred to make the purchase, and partly as having saved or earned the money made for the purpose. The second clause brings out more clearly this last thought, because the "vineyard" is, here doubtless the "field" of the first clause. "The fruit of her hands" is, of course, her earnings. Instead of "planting the vineyard," Stuart translates "is the planting of the vineyard."

Verse 19.—Girdeth her loins with strength, etc. A vivid description of purpose and action.

Verse 18.—She perceiveth, etc. Literally, "she tasteth," that is, has experience of the most perfect and satisfactory nature. Her "merchandise" is rather the returns or profit of her goods (verses 14, 16,) than the goods sold. She takes great satisfaction in the results of her toil and thrift. Not only is she up before light, but the burning lamp (not candle) testifies to business prolonged, at least at times, quite through the night.

Verse 19.—She layeth her hands, etc. Smith's Dictionary says: "The term rendered distaff means the spindle itself, while that rendered spindle represents the whirl of the spindle, a button or circular rim which was affixed to it, and gave steadiness to its circular motion. The spindle was held perpendicularly in the hand, while the other was employed in drawing out the thread."

Verse 20.—Such enterprise and activity would be hateful if prompted only by grasping, hoarding heartless avarice. Hence the relief which this verse brings. She stretcheth out, etc. Literally, she expands, opens wide, that is, to give; not clutching tight in closed fist to keep. Her open hand is not merely for the beggar who seeks her out, but, who reacheth [sends] her hand to the needy. Goes out, hunts up the wretched to help them.

Verse 21.—She is not afraid, etc. In Palestine snow sometimes falls, and here stands in general for cold. The people there would depend upon the clothing rather than fires for warmth. "Scarlet and crimson" designates first the colour and then, perhaps, all goods of a better than ordinary quality.

Verse 22.—Tapestry. Or rather coverings, coverlets, as spread out upon beds (Green.) The root of the original word means to spread, and the word designates thus bed-clothing for night warmth. Silk—rather linen. Purple. "A precious color obtained from certain species of shell-fish," "purple clothes."

Verse 23.—Her husband is known, etc. "The gates," or the place by the gates where was transacted the business of the city among whose officers the husband had place. How true of that the husband's character and position are, as a rule, largely the wife's making—or un-making. If woman's ambition is rather to achieve than to be seen, she cannot complain of lack of sphere and opportunity. She fashions man and consigns him to his place. This she does equally as a mother and as wife.

Verse 24.—This whole description is an acrostic poem, the verses beginning successively with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in their order. This may account for the at least seeming lack of advance in thought in this verse.

Verse 25.—Stuart translates, "strong and beautiful is their clothing; and she laugheth at the time to come."

Verse 26.—Wisdom. Showing that mere worldly gain is not the only or chief thing prized and won and used by the model woman, or commended by the sacred word. The riches of the mind and heart are the best treasures. Kindness. Enterprise can as well co-exist with kindness and sweet gentleness, as with hardness and stern severity.

Verse 27.—She looketh well, etc. The care, nurture, training of the children, the kindly efficient oversight of the servants. Here is the mother's power and glory—training them to like habits with her own.

Verse 28.—The consequence. Rise up. Filial reverence. Call her blessed. Filial affection. These are openly expressed even in the manhood and womanhood of the children. Her husband also he praiseth her. Delights to. So full of love, admiration, appreciation, and with reason. Let husbands not be slow to recognize the virtues and benefactions of their wives.

Verse 30.—Favor. Or grace of person. A warning against the choice for mere external accomplishments or appearances. Piety is made the root of all womanly excellence.

Verse 31.—Instead of "give" we may read commend. This latter fits the connection.

QUESTIONS.—What has Christianity done for woman? Recals some good women of the Bible?

Vs. 12. Our lesson describes an excellent Jewish matron; what would such do for her husband?

As. 20. What would the poor, and the sick, and the dying do now, but for the putting forth of woman's generous hands?

Vs. 23. Ought not a husband to give his good wife a large portion of the credit of his fame.

Vs. 26. What law should be on a woman's lips?

Vs. 29. Are not many husbands, too afraid of praising their wives?

Vs. 30. What is the crowning excellence of woman's worth as well as of man's?

—Baptist Teacher.

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

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

A Play-Room Pest.

BY MADGE CARROLL.

The Andersons were in high glee, prancing and curveting around the play-room. Jesse had mounted his father's cane, Bessie had mounted the rocking-horse, and Theo, that most unmanageable of all steeds, an old umbrella. This latter personage had more trouble with his pony than he knew exactly what to do with, except laugh over, the crooked end being the animal's head, the difficulty was to mount the battered ribs and stay there. No sooner did he imagine himself securely seated, than away would splutter the old bones putting a stop not only to his career, but seriously interfering with that of his brother and sister. At first it was such fun; and the umbrella became more and more unruly every minute, sprawling its rags and ribs about Bessie's rocker, and setting a trap for the solitary hoof of Jesse's thoroughbred, calling forth not simply peals, but shouts of laughter. Unfortunately Jesse and Bessie wearied of the sport before Theo did. They wanted him to stop; he was not ready, so Jesse bounced off his horse with, "I won't play!" Bess followed his example, and away they went to separate corners, leaving Theo in the middle of the room, alone with his bundle of bones. "I don't care!" he pouted. "I let Bess have my horse, and took this mean thing, now you both get mad."

"Take your old stub-tail," answered Bess, with a toss of her auburn curls. "I don't want it."

"He'd rather have a live horse, and ride us all down," put in Jess.

"That he would! So he enjoys himself, it doesn't matter about me," snarled Theo. "Selfish pigs!"

"Pigs! pigs!" howled Bess, red as her curls with anger, and Jess screamed to his mother, who sat in the drawing-room adjoining.

"Ma, do hear that? Theo calls us pigs."

"I've heard much that I am very sorry to hear," answered Mrs. Anderson. They crowded about her, each intent on making his or her cause good, but she silenced them with a gentle, "No, my dears; don't you know that talking such things over is like rolling a little snow-ball through the snow; the further it goes the bigger it gets, and the more real or fancied grievance is discussed the larger its proportions. Try to arrange some play in which you can agree, and let this matter drop."

Although their tongues were hushed on the subject, their thoughts were not; and the close of their day was not as bright as its opening hours, notwithstanding that the sun did its part and kindled crimson amber fires in the west before going down.

After supper Mrs. Anderson told her children the following story:

"Close to the sunrise lies a beautiful but very small country, inhabited entirely by little folks. Big people live outside, none inside of it. It is the privilege of these big people to keep many hurtful and troublesome things from entering this land, yet there's one tiny elf that will get in in spite of them. He is so puny, so insignificant, that he could by no means gain entrance for himself, so he waits and watches around until one of the inhabitants helps him over the wall. Once there, he desolates the country, and scatters the little people right and left. It takes a long time to undo the mischief he makes in a very few minutes. The pity is, knowing this, as all the little folks must know it, they never learn by experience, but in order to avenge some real or fancied injury, let him in time and time again, although the one that does it is just as much a sufferer as the rest. The tiny elf spares nobody."

"Big dunces they to let him in then;" remarked Jesse.

"He's small, you know, and seems harmless," replied Mrs. Anderson.

"Yes, and a bee's small, and seems harmless; but one stung me once. I don't care to try it again. Catch me letting a fellow like that in."

"If I'm not greatly mistaken, you let him in this very day, my son."

"Oh ma!" cried Bessie, "are we the little folks?"

"Then where's our country?"

"Close to the sunrise," put in Theo.

"Where's that?"

"Close to life's sunrise, my loves, and the land lies anywhere where children are allowed to play and have a good time."

"Then who's the little chap I let in to-day?" asked Jessie.

"His name is Won't Play. He is called in without any just cause or provocation, and comes on the shortest notice. I consider him one of the greatest pests of the play-room, almost as dangerous as Hit Back, or Won't Speak, because often when you seem brightest and merriest, in he steps and makes you miserable. It will be a happy day for two big people when you all agree to keep him out of your beautiful country."

"Let's keep him out after this!" exclaimed Jesse, flushed and eager.

"What do you say, Bess and Theo?"

"Agreed," replied Bessie; "agreed!" echoed Theo.

"I wish you could look right into my heart and see just how much pleasure it gives me to have you form this resolution," said Mrs. Anderson, with tears of joy bedewing her kind blue eyes. "Before you retire to rest to-night, ask the good Father, in Christ's name, to give you grace and strength to keep it."

—Christian at Work.

God's Sunshine.

"Well, Aunt Polly, here you are again on the doorsteps. It seems to me that you almost live on them."

Old Polly raised her faded eyes to the face of her friend and laughing, said:

"Yes dear, dat's jus' so! Jim says 'We mought build a house all doo' steps, and nothin' else, fo' granny,' cause she lives dar an' nowhere else."

"I suppose you like to see the people, and to hear the children prattle as they go by to school," said the lady.

"Well, yes, I likes to see folks, 'cause my Fader up dar made em all: but its most fo' the sunshine dat I stay out here, O God's sunshine is a powerful blessin', dear. When I's cold I come out and sits in it, and I grows warm; when I's hungry, and Jim's wife's got nothing to eat, I comes out here and 'pears like I had my dinner; when I's in pain, and 'scrutiated all over wid de rhumatiz, I comes out into de sunshine, and de pain skulks off; when Jim don't be good and 'pears like he was goin' to 'struction, and my heart is bustin'-like, I comes out and sits in God's sunshine, and peace comes through his beams into my soul; when 'old Death comes an' star's in my face, and say, 'I comin, arter ye soon, to take ye into de dark grave,' den I comes out into God's sunshine, and dares him to frighten my soul! Says I to him: 'Ye hasn't power in ye to throw one shadow onto my pillow; for my Blessed Jesus, de Son of righteousness, he been down dar before me, and he left it ful, heaped up, and runnin' over wid God's sunshine. I shall rest sweet in dat warm place for de eternal sunshine dat shall magnify and glorify all as loves de shinin' Jesus."

"Auntie" said her friend, who always felt that she could sit at the feet of this humble saint and learn of Jesus, "that is very lovely. But there comes days when there is no sunshine—when the clouds gather, and the rains, and the snows come and the winds blow. What do you do then?"

"O la, honey, by de time de storms come, I've got my soul so full ob sunshine dat it lasts a heap o' time. Dem times Jim scolds, and his poor wife's 'scouraged, and de child'n are cross, and de stove smokes and de kettle won't boil; but I never knows it. God's sunshine is in my soul, and I tries to spread it around, and sometimes Jim's wife feels it and she say (O she's a good daughter-in-law), 'Long as I keeps close to granny, 'pears like my hearts held up.'"

"Well, well, dear, you can teach me somethin', and ye can fetch me nice things to make mo' sunshine; but I can teach you what ye never thought on—dat God's sunshine's 'nough for rich and poor, and dem dat thank him for it and sits in it, or work in it, and let it into dar heart, will soon go whar it's all sunshine. Try to make folks live in God's sunshine, and get it into dar hearts, honey."

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A bad Fire.

"Jones, have you heard of the fire that burned up the man's house and lot?"

"No, Smith, where was it?"

"Here in the city."

"What a misfortune to him. Was it a house?"

"Yes, a nice house and lot—a good home for any family."

"What a pity! How did the fire take?"

"The man played with fire, and thoughtlessly set it himself."

"How silly! Did you say the lot was burned, too?"

"Yes, lot and all; all gone, slick and clean."

"That is singular. It must have been a terribly hot fire—and then I don't well see how it could burn the lot."

"No, it was not a large fire, nor a very hot fire. Indeed, it was so small that it attracted but little attention, and did not alarm anybody."

"But how could such a little fire burn up a house and lot? You haven't told me."

"It burned a long time—more than twenty years. And, though it seemed to consume very slowly, yet it wore away about one hundred and fifty dollars' worth every year, till it was all gone."

"I can't quite understand you yet. Tell me where the the fire was kindled, and all about it."

"Well, then, it was kindled in the end of a cigar. The cigars cost him, he himself told me, twelve and a half dollars a month, or one hundred and fifty dollars a year, and that, in twenty-one years would amount to \$3,750 besides the interest. Now, the money was worth at least seven per cent., and at that rate it would double about once in ten years. So that the whole sum would be more than ten thousand dollars. That would buy a fine house and lot, even in the city. It would pay for a large farm in the country. Don't you pity the family of the man who has so slowly burned up their home?"

"Wheugh! I guess now you mean me, for I have smoked more than twenty years. But I didn't know it cost so much as that. And I haven't any house of my own. Have always rented—thought I was too poor to own a house. And all because I have been burning it up! What a fool I have been!"

The boys had better never set a fire which costs so much, and which, though it might be so easily put out, is yet so likely, if once kindled, to keep burning all their lives.

WHAT MAKES A MAN SLEEP IN CHURCH? Come right down to the practical question without further preliminaries.

My dear, underpaid sexton, it may be your fault. Would that your brains were equal to your hands. You keep out the fresh air as though it were deadly poison. You keep the stoves too hot in early spring and fall; sometimes in winter. In such an atmosphere as this, Gabriel might blow his trumpet, and, after the novelty of the first five minutes, people would grow drowsy. Air! dear sexton! give us fresh air, sexton! and keep the foul, close air for your own consumption. You are welcome to it!

It may be that the sleepy brother is sleepy from disease. Like one-half of creation, he is the happy owner of a torpid liver. He must be active, or he cannot keep awake. To be quiet is to be sleepy. Quakers never suffer thus, for they always keep awake in their silent meetings. Such a sleeper do not scold; but have for him a world of charity. What he needs is not a withering rebuke—only a box of pills!

This one thing we say, sleepy brother: try to keep-awake. Force your eyes wide open, and keep silent-footed Morpheus at arms' length as long as possible; and, if at last you are his victim, do not snore the fact in the ears of all the congregation.

Sometimes the people sleep, and it is the preacher's fault. Not always. Under Paul, one man fell asleep, and, in consequence, gave his name to history, and became the immortal patron saint of all church sleepers. Not always the preacher's fault, but sometimes. When the voice is low and monotonous, and the matter heavy, and the manner dull, it is hard to keep awake.