

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, February 11th, 1877.—Elijah and the Prophets of Baal.—1 Kings xviii. 19-29.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 25-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."—1 Kings xviii. 21.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 1 Kings xviii. 19-29. Tuesday, vs. 21; 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. Wednesday, vs. 22; 2 Kings vi. 8-18. Thursday, vs. 24; Genesis xv. Friday, vs. 27; Isaiah xlv. Saturday, vs. 28; Acts xix. 21-41. Sunday, vs. 29; Jeremiah x. 1-16.

ANALYSIS.—I. Elijah's challenge to Ahab. Vs. 19, 20. II. Elijah's appeal to Israel. Vs. 21-24. III. Address to Baal's prophets. Vs. 25. IV. Baal deaf to them. Vs. 26. V. Elijah cheers them on. Vs. 27-29.

QUESTIONS.—Where is Mount Carmel? What river flows near it? Where was the scene of Elijah's sacrifice? How high was this eastern bluff? What places were in full view of it?

Vs. 19. Who was Baal? Who Ash-toreth?

Vs. 21. What did the "two opinions" of the people indicate? Why is a compromise between God and the world impossible? Matt. xii. 30; 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. Why did the people "answer him not a word"?

Vs. 22. In what sense was Elijah's loneliness untrue? In what true?

Vs. 24. State the test that Elijah offers to Baal's prophets. Where had God answered by fire before?

Vs. 25. In what matters did Elijah give the prophets of Baal precedence? What was his object in so doing?

Vs. 26. The sacrifice being prepared, what did the priests of Baal proceed to do? How did they manifest their earnestness? What has Jesus called such prayer? Matt. vi. 7. Is prayer any more acceptable to God because it is loud and noisy?

Vs. 27. In what light did Elijah mock them? When is irony a good weapon? When a dangerous one?

Vs. 28. What was the effect of Elijah's sarcasm?

Vs. 29. What resulted from this whole day call of the priests upon Baal?

MOUNT CARMEL is a bold promontory, about twenty miles west of Nazareth, running out to the Mediterranean. From the sea it stretches, a well-wooded upland, twelve or fifteen miles south-easterly, breaking abruptly into the hills of Samaria. To the Israelites Mount Carmel was the Park of Palestine. The Kishon flowed—almost parallel to the mountain—to its terminus in the sea at the mountain's northern base. The scene of Elijah's sacrifice was doubtless inland, a few miles from the sea, near to the highest point of Mount Carmel (1,728 feet). Here Esdraelon, Kishon, Jezreel, Ahab's palace, and Jezebel's temple were in full view. To this place, overlooking Palestine and the great and wide sea, the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and of Ash-toreth came; here, too, did the one prophet of the Lord come to vindicate the one God of Israel. It was in the early morning. Deep silence was over the multitude.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 19.—Now therefore send and gather to me all Israel. "Now," since the time has come to end the trouble in Israel (vs. 17, 18), and to make manifest once for all its real cause. Mark the tone of authority used by the prophet to the king. "All Israel" was in trouble, and an immense concourse was sure to gather at such a call. Carmel. "The scene of the sacrifice is a rocky platform or terrace, encompassed by thickets of evergreens. Upon it are now the ruins of a quadrangular structure of large hewn stones, evidently of remote antiquity and doubtless marking the site of the Lord's altar. Near it, in a vault of ancient masonry, is a copious fountain which may have supplied the water with which the sacrifice was deluged." *Prophets of Baal.* These men professed to have and communicate messages from their God, as did the Hebrew prophet messages from Jehovah. The groves. Of rather *Asherah*, or *Ash-toreth*, the female divinity corresponding to Baal as the male divinity. Which sat at Jezebel's table. Not sat at the table with her, but as supported by her as the special patron of the goddess and of her priests. It seems from what

follows that these priests of Ash-toreth did not come, the crafty Jezebel perhaps suspecting mischief and so influencing them to stay away.

Verse 20.—So Ahab sent, etc. Intent on having a return of rain.

Verse 21.—Elijah came unto all the people. He makes his appeal to the people rather than to the king. How long halt ye between two opinions. Between two parties. To halt is to hobble or limp. If the Lord [Jehovah] be God, rather "the God," that is, the true God. If Jehovah was the God, Baal was not, as there was and is but one true God. Answered him not a word. Why not? Was it from fear of Ahab on one hand and fear of Elijah on the other? Men do not find it easy to throw off established indecision.

Verse 22.—I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord [Jehovah]. Others were living, doubtless many of the hundred saved by Obadiah (vs. 4), as also Micahiah mentioned in xxii. 8, but Elijah alone stood forth, because sent forth, to represent Jehovah and his cause. But Baal's prophets, etc. Worldly power all on the side of Baal. Then the minority of numbers was a great majority of power.

Verse 23.—Two bullocks. One for each party. Let them choose. Giving them the advantage if there were any. Cut it in pieces, etc. Prepare it in the usual way for sacrifice. I will dress, etc. The same condition for the two parties.

Verse 24.—Call ye . . . and I will, etc. They and he were prophets. They as well as he believed in and practiced prayer. They and he were wont to teach that their Gods respectively answered prayer. So was the way clear for this proposal. The God that answereth by fire let him be God. The people made no answer to his challenge—to decide whether Jehovah or Baal were the true God. Now he seems to say, well, if you cannot answer, let God himself answer for you, and so settle the question. The test of fire was one which was fair, especially as Baal was a sun-god, and hence fire was pre-eminently his element. But Jehovah also had been wont to reveal himself by fire, as at the bush to Moses, in the fiery pillar of guidance, and on Sinai, and also in token of his acceptance of sacrifices in cases more like this. Lev. ix. 24; Judges vi. 21; 1 Chron. xxi. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 1. It symbolized especially his justice, and his glory. It is well spoken. The people readily, even gladly, assented. The same is not said and probably is not true of Baal's prophets and special votaries. The people had been seduced into Baal worship.

Verse 25.—Choose you, etc. He gives to them still every advantage as to the victim and time. Everything? Ah, yes, except God.

Verse 26.—They took, etc. To decline had been to surrender, and in presence of that people and that prophet they dared not. O Baal, hear us. Their persistent praying, and in fact the acceptance of the challenge, seems to be taken faith in their God, as one who could and would hear. See Matt. vi. 7; Acts xix. 34. No voice, etc. No answer, no sign, no help. O, dying men, "without God in the world," so must it be in the crisis of thy need. They leaped upon the altar. Or "about" it according to the custom of worship as practiced toward several other heathen divinities. Such dancing has always been a devotional exercise in the East. Frantic wildness was very generally regarded by the heathen as evidence of inspiration.

Verse 27.—Elijah mocked them. In order to expose more clearly and fatally the utter falseness of their faith and practice. Cry aloud. Literally "with a great voice." For he is a god. So you say, and if he is, then of course, he can and will help you if you only secure his services. He is talking, etc. You Baalites and the heathen generally have such a notion of the gods. So keep on till you can get his ear. Pursuing, or better, retired, into a private room.

Verse 28.—Cried aloud. All the louder for the taunt. Out themselves after their manner. Showing that this was not an exceptional usage. It is thought this was a relic of the practice of sacrificing human victims, or a substitute for it, the flowing blood taking the place of the surrendered life.

Verse 29.—Until the time of the offer-

ing, etc. On this see Ex. xxix. 38-44; Num. xxviii. 3-8. The time was "between the evenings," that is, toward sun-down. Compare vs. 41-46. Thus had he given his proud, boastful, domineering, persisting rivals, the whole day save only the closing hours.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, February 18th, 1877.—Elijah and his Sacrifice.—1 Kings xviii. 36-46.

Youths' Department.

The early bird catches the worm.

Poor foolish worm! If he had lain snug in his earthly bed, that early fowl had never made a breakfast of his head.

At noon, no doubt, the bird had sought some distant forest bough; and if the worm had slept till then, he might have lived till now.

Take warning, early risers, all, and heed the lesson taught; the worm that lies in bed is safe—The early worm is caught.

Family life in Nazareth.

He who has seen the children of Nazareth in their red caftans and bright tunics of silk or cloth, girded with a many-colored sash, and sometimes covered with a loose outer jacket of white or blue,—he who has watched the idyllic picture of their games, and heard their ringing laughter as they wander about the hills of their little native vale, or play in bands on the hillside beside their sweet and abundant fountains, may, perhaps, form some conception of how Jesus looked and played when he, too, was a child. And the traveller who has followed any of those children—as I have done—to their simple homes, and seen the scanty furniture, the plain but sweet and wholesome food, the uneventful happy, patriarchal life, may form a vivid conception of the manner in which Jesus lived. Nothing can be plainer than those houses, with the doves sunning themselves on the white roofs, and the vines wreathing about them. The mats, or carpets, are laid loose along the walls; shoes and sandals are taken off at the threshold; from the centre hangs a lamp which forms the only ornament of the room; in some recess in the wall is placed the wooden chest, painted with bright colors, which contains the books or other possessions of the family; on a ledge that runs around the wall, within easy reach, are neatly rolled up the gay-colored quilts which serve as beds, and on the same ledge are ranged the earthen vessels for daily use, near the door stand the large common water jars of red clay, with a few twigs and green leaves—often of the aromatic shrubs thrust into their orifices to keep the water cool. At meal time a painted wooden shoe is placed in the centre of the apartment, a large tray is put upon it, and in the middle of the tray stands the dish of rice and meat, or *libban*, or stewed fruits, from which all help themselves in common. Both before and after the meal, the servant or the youngest member of the family, pours water over the hands from a brazen ewer into a brazen bowl. So quiet, so simple, so humble, so uneventful, was the outward life of the family of Nazareth.—Farrar.

Select Serial.

From the Day of Rest. 'Poor Michel.'

One afternoon last summer I was strolling through the picturesque little cemetery of Avranches,—picturesque, as nearly all French burial-places are, with something a little quaint or perhaps grotesque here and there in their adornments, and even cheerful; gay with many coloured flowers whose sweetness perfumes the air, and cheerful from the strong sense of human life and sympathy which pervades these resting-places of the dead.

One is struck in a French cemetery by the absence of that feeling of forsakenness which so often oppresses us in our own churchyards.

Here, everything seems to speak of ties yet unbroken, of memories fondly cherished, of friendships that death's cold hand is powerless to dissolve. Not so much is this impression conveyed by the various little family groups straying

here and there, or by the pleasant babble of children's voices heard now and again among the tombs, as by the touching little inscriptions on the wreaths of *immortelles*, with which each small black and gilt cross is thickly garnished—still more by the bouquets of newly gathered flowers, which lie fresh and fragrant on so many humble graves, telling at once their simple tale of love unburied, and memories 'kept green.'

It certainly is a pleasant trait in our French neighbours, fickle as they are so often called, this unforgetfulness of their dead!

It was standing beside the grave of a little child, a baby of three years, whose favourite toys, a woolly lamb and tiny painted cart, were preserved as relics in a roughly-constructed glass-case beside the head-stone, which told her age and name; and I was thinking—thinking of the withered hopes, the much love, the many tears that lay buried alongside of the little one under the blossoming rose bushes—thinking on the strange ruling of our lives and deaths, and wondering how things now so incomprehensible will seem to us, when we can see them, not through a glass darkened by error and infirmity, but as God sees—wondering about many things, when my reverie was interrupted by the approach of heavy footsteps, which gradually slackened till they stopped beside me.

I turned to receive the kindly greeting which is unailing from the lips of the French peasantry.

The new-comer was an old woman, brown-faced and wrinkled, with a snowy cap-border encircling the brown face, a huge striped-blue apron tied about her ample waist, a gay kerchief pinned across her shoulders, a large green umbrella in her hand, and a basket, filled with exquisite crimson roses, on her arm.

The brown face was a kindly one, and smiled upon me as I moved a little away from the infant's grave, to enable her to approach it.

'Ah! pardon, madame, let not madame disturb herself, she said; 'I came but to lay these few roses on the *bebé's* grave, and on his,' and as she spoke, she emptied the fragrant contents of her basket, dividing the flowers between the grave of the little child at which I was standing, and the one next to it, which she literally smothered in the rich blossoms.

'How beautiful,' I say, impulsively.

The old woman smiles. 'He loved them so, she says, 'he would sit and watch them opening, and talk to them by the hour together, poor child.'

I leave the *bebé's* grave to stand beside that of her neighbour.

'Who was he, this one, was he your son?' I asked of the woman.

'Ah! no; thank God,' is the quick answer; 'and yet,' says the old peasant, pensively, 'if Madame had known him, she would, perhaps, blame me that I should speak thus—'I was his nurse,' she adds simply, 'and he was the son of Monsieur le Comte, of the Château there.'

All this time I have been trying to make out the inscription on the rough wooden cross, which is at the head of the grave. I think I have it now. Can it be? I read it aloud—

'Pauvre Michel, Aimé du bon Dieu.'

'Yes,' says the old woman, answering my unspoken question. 'That is right, that is what he liked to be called, so we put it up, just for a while, till the fine stone that Monsieur le Comte has ordered to be carved is ready; but I doubt,' she adds, 'if our poor Michel will lie any the happier under that, than he does under the roses, and the little rough bits of wood that Georgette and I nailed together, and that old Jean the carpenter cut his name upon.'

'What was the matter with him? Why should he be "poor Michel"?' I ask.

'Would Madame like to hear?' eagerly returns my gossip. 'Let me then make a seat for Madame,' she says, quickly taking off her great blue apron and spreading it out on a little thymy knoll close by. 'If Madame will give herself the trouble to listen, I will tell her of my poor boy, whom we all so loved, though,' she adds, a little doubtfully, 'I am not sure that Madame, who did not know him as we did, will care to hear. After all, the poor child was but

an imbecile, yet truly we love to talk and to think of him.'

'Indeed,' I say, as I take my seat on the hospitably spread apron. The subject does not strike me as being a particularly promising one, but the good woman is evidently so anxious to tell her tale, that it would be discourteous in me to appear to be indifferent. I make room on the wide blue apron for my companion to sit beside me. After a little protest on her part and persistence on mine, she accepts the offer, and at once begins her narrative.

'Madame asks why he should have been called *poor Michel*. Well, well, perhaps, after all, it was a mistake. Madame must judge, but I will go back to the beginning. His father was, as I have said, M. le Comte d'Auray—everybody knows the name about these parts, and a bad name too, Monsieur d'Auray had. I knew him from a boy—he and I were foster-children Madame must know, but for all that I cannot say much good of him. Eh! as I tell Madame, I knew him well; and sorely did I pity the poor, weak, silly bit of a girl that he brought out of the convent to make his wife. A sad life I fancy she had of it, though she was Madame le Comtesse, and drove in a grand carriage, and wore beautiful dresses and jewels—after all, grand trappings don't mend broken hearts, Madame. He was very polite was the Comte to her in public, very polite, but I heard from the servants, of the goings-on at the Château, and of all his cruel, hard ways at home; of his speeches, that cut like knives; and of long days and days spent by the poor lady in crying, and wishing they had never taken her away from the quiet convent where she had been at peace. 'He would have done better, perhaps, the Comte, if he had had a more spirited wife. As it was, Madame, who was very young, and gentle, and timid, pined away and grew paler and more timid day by day.

'At last Michel was born. A fine big boy he was, to be sure, and Monsieur who had been terribly anxious, it seems, about an heir, was quite in good temper and made the whole country round ring with his rejoicings.

'After the little boy's birth, the Countess never seemed to rally, but just sank quietly quietly away, like the wick of a candle that is burnt out, and though Monsieur was enough, one would have thought, to have roused any one, he could never rouse her, and before Michel was three years old she died. I was very sorry for her, though at the same time, Madame, I can never but feel somehow thankful that the poor lady should have been taken just when she was, just before everybody began to find out that the child Michel was not quite as he should be. It did seem, at the time, hard for the young thing to die and leave her child with nobody in the world to look to, but such a man as was Monsieur, his father; but afterwards, I for one, at least, came to understand how God took her just out of His love, to save her the sight of much that He knew would be too sad for a mother's eyes to see. We, as yet, knew nothing about it. That was why, put in the old woman parenthetically, 'we thought His dealings hard.'

'Well,' she went on after a moment's pause, 'as I was saying, or meant to say, Monsieur le Comte grieved a good bit after his wife was dead, in his stormy, passionate way. When she was really gone, remorse at the unkindness which had, there is no doubt of it, killed her, filled his heart; and though he had scolded and frightened her to the very last, refusing to believe in her illness, when she was gone he was sorry, and would have made what amends he could by devoting himself to the child. There is no doubt of it, he was proud of him, and though he was too passionate and selfish ever to have made a good, I think he might have made a *fond* one had things turned out differently.

(To be continued.)

A Madrid correspondent says that the repressive measures adopted by the Government have had an opposite effect from what was intended on Protestant churches. The public notice taken of these churches awakened a curiosity to know what was done inside them, and rarely a night passes without ten or twenty new faces appearing in the various places of worship in Madrid.