

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, March 18th, 1877.—The Spirit of Elisha.—2 Kings ii. 13-25.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 15-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"They said, The Spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."—2 Kings ii. 15.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 2 Kings ii. 13-25. Tuesday, vs. 13; Psalm cii. 12-28. Wednesday, vs. 19; Joshua v. 12-27. Thursday, vs. 21; Matthew xv. 7-20. Friday, vs. 23; Genesis xxviii. 10-22. Saturday, vs. 23; Job xxx. 1-15. Sunday, vs. 24; Proverbs xxii. 6-16.

ANALYSIS.—I. The return to Jericho. Vs. 13-15. II. The search for Elisha. Vs. 16-18. III. The waters of Jericho healed. Vs. 19-22. IV. The children and the bears. Vs. 23-25.

QUESTIONS.—What is the meaning of the name "Elijah"? Of "Elisha"? There were strong contrasts between these two men of God; state some of them? How was Elijah greater than Elisha? How was he less?

Vs. 13. When was this mantle first cast upon Elisha? Why does Elisha now take it up?

Vs. 14. What evidence is there in the verse that Elisha had Elijah's spirit, as well as his garment? Who saw this miracle performed?

Vs. 15. How do these "sons of the prophets" show their recognition of Elisha as Elijah's successor?

Vs. 16. Why this search for Elisha? How long was it continued? With what result? What makes it best sometimes to let men have their own way? Where was Elisha at this time?

Vs. 19. How did the prophets in Jericho make good use of Elisha while they had him? What judgment had God fulfilled in the region of Jericho? Ps. cvii. 33, 34.

Vs. 20. Why did Elisha ask for anything? Why for a cruse? Why new? Why for salt?

Vs. 21. Why go to the spring of the waters instead of to the channel? Matt. xv. 18, 19. What then, should be every one's prayer? Ps. li. 10.

Vs. 23. Where was Bethel? By whom was it honored? Gen. xxviii. 10-22. By whom dishonored? 1 Kings xii. 28, 29. What happened to Elisha on entering Bethel? How was the hair of Elisha's head different from Elijah's? Is there any evidence that Elisha was bald? Who were these little children? Is it known how many there were in all? How many were torn to pieces? How does ungodliness make men irreverent?

CHARACTER OF ELISHA.—This, as differing from Elijah's, is indicated in the name Elisha. Elijah means "my God is Jehovah," and as if conscious of this, Elijah acted with awful might and severity: but Elisha means, "God is salvation"—that is, "one who saves." Hence, while Elijah is known as a slayer and destroyer of whatever opposed and interfered with the rights of Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, Elisha who comes after him, is known, not as a destroyer, but as a healer. Of Elijah's parentage and birthplace we know nothing; Elisha was the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, near the plain of Jezreel. 1 Kings xix. 16, 19. Elisha was a man of the mountains, a real Bedouin of the desert; Elisha dwelt in cities, as in the present lesson he abides in Jericho (vs. 18); thence he passed to Samaria (vs. 25); he lived "indoors," "houses," as an inhabitant of civilized life. See ch. v. 3; vi. 32; vi. 13. In contrast with Elijah's disordered locks, his hair was worn trimmed behind. See note on vs. 23. He used a walking-staff, of the kind usually carried by grave or aged citizens. Ch. iv. 29. There is no hint of his ever wearing Elijah's mantle. "Close as was the succession" (as Stanley says in his sketch of Elisha, which Dr. Hackett speaks of as "one of surpassing interest"), "it was a succession, not of likeness, but of contrast. What was begun by Elijah in fire and storm, in solitude and awful visions, must be carried on through winning arts and healing acts and gentle words of peaceful and social intercourse; not in the desert of Horeb or on the top of Carmel, but in the crowded thoroughfares of Samaria, in the gardens of Damascus, by the rushing waters of Jordan."

EXPOSITION.—Verse 13.—And he took up also the mantle, etc. This mantle as we have seen (1 Kings xix. 19; 2 Kings ii. 8) was in a special sense Elijah's badge of prophetic office and power. Its fall from his shoulders as he was ascending, was taken as a token of the answer of Elisha's request, and an instrument of the power of its former possessor, now resting on its present possessor. Went back. Alone over the road where the two walked in holy converse. Vs. 11. Verse 14.—That fell from him. Mark the repetition of these words as implying that the fall had a special meaning. See above on vs. 1. Smote the waters. As Elijah did, (vs. 8). with the mantle. Where is the Lord [Jehovah] God of Elijah? The original includes in the question the added words, "even he." It is an appeal to Jehovah to reveal himself in the same majesty and power as through Elijah. Verse 15.—The sons of the prophets, etc. See vs. 7. Still watching the returning one, as they had watched the departing two. The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. The spirit regarded as the secret of power. They came to meet him, etc. The recognition of God's installation of him into the office of the departed Elijah. Verse 16.—Fifty strong men. Young men. The words are those of the head man. Let them go, etc. To find either the dead body of Elijah for burial, or Elijah alive. The former would rather seem to be their thought, in view of the fact that they had been assured that he was to be taken from Elisha that day, evidently understanding it as a final removal. Vs. 5. They may have queried now whether he were not taken away only temporarily. Ye shall not send. Elisha had been made to understand that the separation was complete and final. To make search appeared to him not merely a fruitless work, but almost an infidelity and a tempting of God. Verse 17.—Urged, etc. Not to be reasoned out of their view. Send. He had made all the opposition needful. Unable to convince them by argument, he would commend them to the logic of facts. The shame of Elisha was perhaps partly the sense of seeming to act an unfriendly, or even ambitious and jealous part, in resisting this importunity of loving admiration. Three days.—Thorough search. In vain. Verse 18.—Did I not say, etc. To vindicate himself. So ends the story of Elijah—romantic, thrilling, passing strange, yet strictly true, and full of practical lessons, and richest meaning. Verse 19.—The men of the city. Apparently prominent residents, who yet also recognized Elisha's prophetic character. I pray thee. The language of one speaking in behalf of all. The situation of the city is pleasant. "Situated on a broad plain, traversed by an abundant river, shaded by groves of palm-trees (Deut. xxxiv. 3) and fig-mulberries (Luke xix. 4), the air scented with aromatic shrubs, opobalsam, myrobalsam, and the like, facing the Orient and shaded by the Quarantana mountains from the setting sun, Jericho may well have been regarded by its inhabitants even at this time as a 'pleasant' place." The water is naught. Good for nothing, worthless. The ground barren. In consequence of the bad quality of the water. Verse 20, 21.—Bring me a new cruse, etc. Their part, to show still further their faith, and also their obedience. The cruse, or dish, was to be new. I have healed, etc. I, Jehovah, not the prophet; showing that the power and agency actually effecting the miraculous result were solely divine. There shall not be from thence, etc.—The spring is now called Ain-es-Sultan, is "about a mile from the site of the ancient town," and is described as "a large, beautiful fountain of sweet and pleasant water." Verse 22.—So the waters, etc. A proof that God had made Elisha Elijah's successor. Verse 23.—Went up, etc. From Jericho to Bethel, back along the way he and Elijah had so recently come. In Elisha's time covered with a dense forest, the haunt of savage animals." Little children. The term here translated children sometimes means a servant, whatever his age, and in other cases is applied to persons up even to the age of forty. See Gen. iv. 23; xxi. 16; xxii. 12; xxxvii. 2; Judges viii. 20; 1 Kings iii. 7; xx. 15; 2 Kings iv. 12; ix. 4; xix. 6. They were not so young as not to know better than to mock God's prophet, or as not to represent truly their parents and the citizens of the place which, as the seat of Jericho's calf-worship might be expected to lack godliness. Go up thou bald head. The words "go up," may refer to Elisha's walk up the hill in Bethel rather than to Elijah's ascent. The point of the sneer and taunt lies in the epithet "bald head," which designates, a head bald, or if not strictly bald at least close cut, or shaven, on its back part. The Hebrews had another word for baldness in front, or for high forehead. Elijah seems to have worn his hair long, hanging down over his neck; and this is a sneer at Elisha's pretension to Elijah's place and power, but certainly not, as so many take it, at his old age. He was not now old, as he lived and filled his office some fifty-six years after this. Verse 24.—Cursed. Moved by God's Spirit to pronounce upon them as a prophet God's wrath at their conduct. Two she bears. This miracle of judgment showed as an exceptional act that mercy must not be despised. As to the presence of such animals in this region see 1 Sam. xvii. 34; 1 Kings xx. 36; Amos v. 19. The event ought to teach us to honor God—his name, his servant; his house, whatever represents him. Verse 25.—To Mount Carmel. Where Elijah had contended with Baal's prophets and vindicated Jehovah's claims.—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, March 25th, 1877.—Review.

Select Serial.

From Day of Rest. DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

II.—CRUMBS OF COMFORT.

They crossed the dusty road, and went and sat down a little farther on, under some fine elms.

The yellow leaves lay thick around them, telling that the lovely summer was past and gone. Yet the evening was quite summer-like, so bright, so soft and balmy, that the discomfort of chilliness was not yet added to their other discomforts, as they sat there in their scanty clothing.

The boy sat clasping his knees for a time, and looking disconsolately at his swollen toes sticking out of his boots. In her eagerness to reach her home during that fair weather, Dora Haldane had pressed on much faster than usual for the last day or two, and the little lad was suffering in consequence.

After resting a few minutes the pain somewhat abated, and then he began to look about him with boyish interest. He had a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, and many a time during each day he called his mother's attention to objects which he thought beautiful.

Now as he sat with his face turned towards the glowing west it grew bright with admiration. 'Look at those lovely clouds, mother!' he said; 'there's one like the Castle-rock at Edinburgh, but all so golden and lovely!'

She raised her head, which was bowed in her hands, and admired them, to please the enthusiastic child. They watched them for some time changing into fantastic shapes, and then the mother bowed her head on her hands again, sitting in an attitude of deep dejection.

The boy presently drew from his pocket two or three marbles, and making sundry hieroglyphics in the dust, began to play at 'peek off,' as he called it, in a quiet, subdued manner, oblivious for the time of his sore feet.

He had not long enjoyed himself, when suddenly the sound of loud singing caused him to stand upright and thrust the marbles back into his pocket. At the same moment his mother raised her head and said, 'It is one of dear father's favourite hymns, Hughie.'

'What place is that over there where the singing is?' he asked. 'I suppose it's a little chapel,' she answered, looking across at the plain brick building a little way down the road.

'Let us go and look in, mother,' said Hughie, 'I do like to hear people singing hymns.'

'We are not very decent to go to church or chapel,' she said, looking down at her dusty dress. 'But it isn't Sunday, mother, and nobody expects us to have on our Sunday clothes to day.'

She smiled sadly at his allusion to the Sunday clothes which were not; and feeling sorely the need of some crumb of comfort, which haply she might meet there, she said, 'Yes, we will go and look in, Hughie.'

She rose up and shook her dress, then took his hand and walked slowly across the road, in at the gateway leading to the front of the little new building on which was inscribed, 'Primitive Methodist Chapel, A. D. 1856.'

To judge from the volume of sound issuing from the place to the strains of the Old Hundred, the building might have been full of worshippers. But upon entering they found it was not so, although the whole congregation was singing and praising with their whole soul.

A man, evidently of the working-class, stepped out of his seat directly he caught sight of Dora's pale face in the doorway, and ushered her and her boy into a pew. She leaned back, thankful for the welcome rest, and fixed her eager sunken eyes upon the man in the pulpit. He also seemed to belong to the working-class: he was of medium height, with a broad chest, and an earnest, determined face. His voice was very powerful, and he had no idea whatever how he ought to use it. He simply spoke at his very highest pitch, in a voice of thunder, every word of which might have been clearly heard in a building capable of holding five thousand persons. Amongst his audience those who were used to this kind of oratory sat placid and comfortable as if listening to the softest strains of music; but a few of the more nervous and sensitive, Dora amongst the number,—cowered painfully under the fierce blast of sound.

She felt at first that she would not stay; but finding that this was not the sermon, which might probably last an hour, but a preliminary part of the service, namely, the reading of the twelfth chapter of Luke, with a running commentary thereon, she thought she would try to remain till the reading was over, and then slip out while the next hymn was being sung.

The man spoke tersely, wisely, well, as he went along, out of his heartfelt experience; and his words were full of living power. As sentence after sentence of stirring force fell from his lips, his small congregation kept up a running fire of 'Hallelujahs,' 'Praise the Lord,' 'Bless His Holy Name,' and similar exclamations of apparently deep feeling. Dora presently became oblivious of the loudness of his voice, and drank in the gracious words of comfort which fell from his lips, concerning the good Lord's faithfulness, His tender care of His children, His guiding Hand, His watching eye. 'Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' 'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God. Fear not; ye are of more value than many sparrows.'

Then the preacher dilated upon this, adding anecdote to homily, and speaking like a rushing torrent which carried all before it. The tears slowly crept from beneath Dora's dark-fringed lids and rolled down her pale face, but they were not of sorrow: she wept because she felt so comforted and strengthened.

The truths to which she was listening were roughly put forth, in the very plainest garb; but how acceptable were they to those who listened! There are many ministers of the gospel, illiterate men who know nothing of science, and very little of logic, who study their Bibles earnestly and with simple hearts, ignoring all other studies, and praying earnestly and unceasingly for illumination from above, that heavenly wisdom may be given to them. Such men preach Gospel truths with a childlike simplicity, and an unquestioning faith and assurance, that learned sceptics would pronounce ignorant temerity. But though not acceptable to the fastidious and worldly-wise, let us consider how refreshing and strengthening the preaching of such men is to the poor and unlettered of earth's troubled children, whose earnest cry is for comfort for their souls, for bread for their spiritual sustenance, no matter how coarse and uninviting it may seem to pampered palates. The dainty theological delicacies that are prepared by some of our polished preachers for souls who never felt the need of spiritual bread, would ill suit those who relish the soul-

food which is given to them by those rough and unlearned, yet earnest servants of God. Let us not hastily condemn their crude forms of expression, their sometimes harsh manner, because they grate upon our more refined senses, which can appreciate and enjoy only what is correct and harmonious. Let us rather honour them for their earnestness, which is the highest virtue in preaching, and leave them to those who benefit by them.

Dora left the place in a very different frame of mind from that in which she entered it. She crossed the road and went and sat down under the trees again, in the same attitude as before. It betokened despondency, but there was no despondency in her heart now: she was praying, with strong faith that her prayers would be answered, pleading that she and her boy might find her mother, and that they both might be made a blessing to her.

She was presently roused by Hugh pulling at her dress, and looking up she saw that a lady and gentleman were crossing the road to come to her. When they spoke to her, she rose up.

'You seem to be in trouble, my poor woman,' said the gentleman kindly. 'Are you a stranger in this place?'

'Yes, I am a stranger now,' she replied quietly. 'My little boy and I are on our way to London.'

'How will you get there?' he asked. 'We are walking, sir.'

'Walking! Then you have no means to travel. May I ask where you come from?'

He spoke in a respectful manner, perceiving that she was not a common tramp.

She told him in few words that she was a widow and had made her way from Edinburgh, to seek for her mother telling her name and where she had lived.

'Ah,' said he, 'I remember the woman, and that she left the place some time ago. I fear it is like seeking a needle in a stack of hay to go to London in search of her; but I hope you may find her. If you need help in the future, write to me if you like, to Colton Hall in this place.'

Colton Hall! The name brought tears to Dora's eyes; it was there her husband was employed as decorator, when she first met him.

The lady had not yet spoken. Now she remarked in a manner very disagreeable to Dora, 'I am glad you seem to be grateful, my poor woman. Poor people are generally so outrageously ungrateful; they cannot appreciate kindness.'

'I was just thinking of my husband, madam,' answered Dora, with dignity. 'He was working at Colton Hall when I first met him.'

'How long ago?' asked the gentleman, with interest.

'About twelve years, sir.'

'Ah, the last time my father had the place renovated before his death. Was your husband one of the workmen employed?'

'The overseer, sir, Hugh Haldane.'

'I remember him well; many a chat I had with him over the work. Well, Mrs. Haldane, my time is precious now, and I cannot stop to say more, but you will let me assist you on to London; and if you find yourself in trouble there, I should be glad if you would let me know.'

He put half-a-sovereign into her hand, which she received with a flush of pleasure and gratitude, and a very low 'Thank you, sir.'

As they were turning away the lady said, 'What a pretty boy you have! such lovely eyes and wavy hair!'

Little Hugh looked down abashed. Sensitive natures shrink as much from foolish flattery as from blame; and he did not like the lady's words.

'Come, dear Hughie,' said his mother, when they had passed on, 'we shall get to London to-night.'

(To be Continued.)

Men may live amidst enmities, but will not escape the enmity and pursuit of their own sin. This shadow at their heels will not leave them, which means destruction.

False is the creed of those who hold that it is profitable to renounce the present life; cannot ye see the eternal existence commences in this life?

Virtue is not left to stand alone. He who practices it will have neighbors.