

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, April 8th, 1877.—The Shunamite's Son.—2 Kings iv. 25-37.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 32-36.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."—Matt. xv. 28.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 2 Kings iv. 8-37. Tuesday, vs. 25; James v. 13-20. Wednesday, vs. 27; John xi. 32-52. Thursday, vs. 27; Mark x. 13-31. Friday, vs. 34; 1 Kings xvii. 17-24. Saturday, vs. 21, 25; Matt. xv. 21-28. Sunday, vs. 37; Matt. x. 34-42.

ANALYSIS.—I. The interview at Mount Carmel. Vs. 25-30. II. The return to Shunem. Vs. 30-32. III. The child raised to life. Vs. 32-35. IV. The mother and child. Vs. 36, 37.

QUESTIONS.—Where was Shunem? What was the hospitality shown to Elisha there? Vs. 8-11. How was it repaid? Vs. 12-17. What miracles of Elisha foreshadowed similar ones by Christ?

Vs. 25. Where on Mount Carmel was Elisha? Vs. 27. How was that journey taken? Vs. 28.

Vs. 26. Why did the Shunammite woman answer Gehazi's inquiry with the words, "It is well"?

Vs. 27. Why did this woman take Elisha by the feet? Where is the practice still observed? Why did Gehazi draw near to thrust the Shunammite mother away? What similar rudeness did Christ's disciples show? What was Elisha's command? When is it a sign of intelligence to confess ignorance?

Vs. 28. With what does this mother reproach Elisha?

Vs. 29. Why the command to salute no man? Why the command to lay the staff upon the face of the child?

Vs. 30. Why this double oath of the Shunammite woman? Compare 1 Kings ii. 2, 4, 6.

Vs. 31. When the Bible speaks of death as a "sleep," does it refer to the soul?

Vs. 33. Why did Elisha pray?

Vs. 34. Why stretch himself so closely upon the child? Whom did he imitate? Was the miracle performed instantaneously? Why not? Give other examples of progressive miracles. (See explanation on this verse.)

Vs. 35. Why this allusion to the child's sneezing?

Vs. 37. What act of the Shunammite mother precedes the exercise of her motherly affection? Whom are we to love before all else? Matt. x. 37.

Shunem, the modern Solam, was on the southwest flank of the so-called "Little Hermon," three miles north of Jezreel, five from Gilboa, in full view of the sacred spot of Elisha on Mount Carmel, and situated in the midst of the finest corn-fields in the world. Three of Elisha's miracles, raising the dead to life, multiplying food (vs. 42-45), and healing the leper (ch. v.), foreshadow those of Christ. These miracles were wrought during the reign of Jehoram, the fame of which did not fail to strengthen the cause of true religion.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 25.—Came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. Here was a company of "the sons of the prophets," as at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho (ii. 25), and stated religious services. Vs. 23. This explains why Elisha was there, and we are not to think of it as his residence. See vs. 8, 9; vi. 13. Saw her afar off. Literally, "Saw her over against"—the mountains facing and overlooking the whole plain, so that one passing across it could easily be seen "afar off" through the clear atmosphere. Gehazi, his servant. A personal attendant, and ministrant, holding nearly the same relation to Elisha which Elisha had formerly held to Elijah, though destined to no such honorable career and succession. vs. 27. Behold, yonder is that Shunammite. Notice in the Common Version that "yonder is" are in italics, which shows that there are no words corresponding to them in the Hebrew.

Verse 26.—Run now, etc. He seems to have suspected trouble. He shows his anxiety in thus sending his servant so soon and in such haste with such message of friendly greeting and inquiry, instead of waiting her arrival. The inquiry shows the nature of his suspicion, and the mention of the child indicates at least, his knowledge of the mother's peculiarly tender and anxious love for that only son. Her answer, Well, or Peace, the usual word of greeting, is not

to be taken as a falsehood, but simply a friendly recognition of inquiry.

Verse 27.—To the hill. "To the mountain," that is, to Carmel. Gehazi had gone out upon the plain to meet and greet her. She caught him by the feet. The customary method of urging earnest supplication referred to frequently by Homer, in the Iliad, and implied in such passages as Matt. xviii. 29; Mark v. 22; and the like. How the custom arose is uncertain; perhaps to stay one from going away, and keep him near to help. Gehazi came near, etc. He thought she was quite too familiar with his master. A similar mistake to that made by Eli as to Hannah (1 Sam. i. 13-16), and the zeal of Gehazi took much the same form as that of the apostles in Luke xviii. 16. How prone are we to impute to others motives which they have not, and how easily under such mistake we can inflict a terrible wound upon a pure person's feelings or reputation! Let her alone; for her soul, etc. The suspicions awakened by her coming were changed into assurance by the agony seated in her eyes and on her features, and speaking in her passionate act, and in her enforced silence. The Lord [Jehovah] hath hid it from me, etc. This is nothing against his prophetic character, since no prophet did or could know otherwise than other men save in such things as God was pleased to reveal to them. The prophets were not omniscient. Hence God hid it from Elisha only as he did from Gehazi by not revealing it.

Verse 28.—Then she said. Not till now could she so command and control her feelings as to speak. Did I desire, etc. Referring to the circumstances of vs. 14-17. Without my request was the son given, and in this mercy of God I find my plea for help now, for the completing and crowning of the former mercy with a like, but greater, mercy. She does not say the child is dead, and she had no need to do so, for her plea is also the announcement. She now implies that the loss of her son would be the deception deprecated in vs. 16, because the great desire for a son was that the family might have an heir, and a future representative, to build up the house, carry forward its fortunes, and give it its chance and share in the Messianic promises and hopes.

Verse 29.—Gird up thy loins. To gather his robe up and together to give freedom of movement. The way was long, and speed was to be used. Take my staff, etc. We think of the wonder-working staff of Moses, and the mantle of Elijah. The staff was in general a badge or symbol of office, that is, the king's sceptre. Compare Ezek. xix. 11. If thou meet, etc. Salutations would lead to conversation and delay, hence his command. Compare Luke x. 4. Lay my staff, etc. Apparently at the time expecting thus to restore life, and to do nothing more. The failure (vs. 31) is to be explained by vs. 30.—The woman's faith did not match or respond to Elisha's even after he had sent the staff, and hence the miracle, though wrought, was less signal, and glorious.

Verse 30.—As the Lord [Jehovah] liveth, etc. A strong expression of an unconquerable purpose. She had no hope but in Elisha's presence. Compare Martha's words in John xi. 21. The feeling and purpose were both natural.

Verse 31.—Neither voice nor hearing. "Literally neither voice nor attention." Seeming to imply that Gehazi spoke after laying on the staff and received neither answer by voice nor any other sign of hearing. Went again. He came back part way. It must now have been well toward evening. Vs. 20. Not awaked. From the sleep of death. 1 Kings i. 21.

Verse 32.—Upon his bed. Elisha's bed. Vs. 21.

Verse 33-35.—Compare the similar account of Elijah's method in raising the widow's son. 1 Kings xvii. 19-22. Elisha seems to have had that event in mind and to have imitated his predecessor. The whole account shows the intense, all-absorbing, agonizing interest of Elisha in the object desired. He prayed, wrestled in prayer, persisted, believed, and conquered. This mode of joining himself to the corpse was a language, a speech, a natural mode of expressing his mighty prayer. Christ has become our resurrection and life by connecting himself with the lost and dead race.

Verse 36.—Take up thy son. Glad

words—"born again." We think of Isaac restored to Abraham at Moriah, and of the son of the widow of Nain "delivered to his mother" Luke vii. 15. Compare also 1 Kings xvii. 23.

Verse 37.—She went in, etc. First showed her gratitude to God and his prophet, and then took to her heart the gift restored to her by God through his prophet. What a day had that been. Every day that our children are kept alive calls for such gratitude as should be excited by making them alive.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, April 16th, 1877.—Naaman the Leper.—2 Kings v. 1-14.

Select Serial.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. VII.—MATTHEW'S HOSPITALITY.

Matthew Pedder soon returned with the wife of one of his neighbours, who set about restoring Mrs. Haldane to consciousness in the most business-like manner. Her efforts proved successful in about five minutes; and as soon as Mrs. Haldane was able to sit up on a chair, the neighbour hurriedly left, saying it was Saturday night, and she was over busy.

Matthew thanked her for the assistance she had given,—thanked her very heartily; for what could he have done with a fainting woman, and no experience in managing persons or things? His own wants were of the most primitive kind, and so was his whole style of living. For thirty years he had led a bachelor sort of life, had waited on himself all that time, receiving no assistance from anybody excepting on Saturdays, when a charwoman came to clean up his place, and wash his clothes.

During those thirty years he had had the same charwoman, who had come regularly every Saturday to scrub and wash for him, unless prevented by sickness, and that was only on very rare occasions. But early in the preceding summer this poor woman had laid aside scrubbing-brushes and wash-tubs for ever, and had gone unnoticed, unmissed, save by a very few, to the rest of the grave.

Then Matthew had to look about for a substitute for his old Nancy, as he had always called her, and after being for a time much troubled by incapable helps, whom he ruthlessly dismissed one after the other, with volleys of angry words about their incompetent and dishonest ways, he at length found an elderly woman, Dorothy Sharp by name, whom he considered a pretty good substitute for his faithful and well-managing Nancy. Matthew enjoyed excellent health, so that he was well able to do what little he required for himself. He had scarcely ever known a day's illness in his life, and this he attributed to his style of living. Anyone seeing the small array of cooking utensils in his little back kitchen would have pronounced him anything but an epicure, or gourmand; they consisted merely of a tea-kettle, three saucapans of different sizes, a toasting-fork, and tea and coffee pots.

His experience in cooking consisted, year after year, in making oatmeal porridge, boiling potatoes, and occasionally eggs, and broiling or toasting fish. Of butcher's meat he had an abhorrence, and it was never seen in his house excepting on Saturdays, when he allowed his charwoman to choose steak or chop, or what she pleased, and cook it as best she could. He was also an abstainer from intoxicating drinks; but he did not obtrude his peculiarities in the matter of eating and drinking upon others; he allowed his charwoman to fetch beer for her dinner if she liked it in moderation; but he was loud in his condemnation of the secret dram-drinkers, and the pronounced drunkards. He scorned and despised them utterly, so also did he those high livers whose tables brought upon them dyspepsia, gout, and all the other ills to which such people are subject.

As the poor woman in his shop returned to consciousness he felt a sense of satisfaction in thinking that his little house had been made clean and tidy that day by Dorothy Sharp, who had retired from her labours about half-an-hour previously.

'I've got a nice cup of tea,' he said kindly, 'and you shall come and have

it by my fire, if you like. You look half perished with cold and want, both of ye, and this chap looks as blue as a whetstone with cold and fright. He thought his mammy was clean gone, didn't he now? But no, she ain't gone, nor ain't likely to: she'll be as right as ninepence when she 'as had a dish of tea, and some o' my good bread-and-butter. Come for'ards, missis, or back-ards, or whatever it is into my little kitchen, and jest make yerself at home a bit, and then you'll quite get over that nasty fainting fit. I've never fainted myself, but I've heard folks say as it doubles 'em clean up, like, and it can't be comfortable, I know.'

Dora rose from her chair, and taking Hughie's hand for support, she tottered into the little kitchen behind the shop, where a good fire was burning, casting a cheery glow over the place, and making everything look very cosy and home-like.

'This is the old bear's den,' said Matthew, facetiously. 'I lives here alone, I do, that is Tom, my black cat, and me. Hist, Tom! where are ye?' he called. And Tom came slowly out from under the table, stretched himself on the rug, and then sat up to blink enquiringly at the intruders into his quiet domain.

Dora sat down in the large wooden arm-chair, bare of cushion, and felt grateful for the rest in that warm atmosphere.

Hughie stood beside her, rather shyly watching Mr. Matthew as he set cups and saucers on the table, and fetched from his back kitchen a loaf of brown bread, some butter, and a jug of milk. Having set these out in a fashion of his own, and placed the teapot also on the table, he said, 'Now make a good meal while I go back to my shop. Don't be so soft as to spare, missis; give the boy plenty, as much as he can eat, and give him more milk than tea: there's nothing like milk for a growing boy; and that's good country milk and butter I can warrant, though you find it in Shoreditch. I'm as faddy that getting my milk and butter, and takes as much trouble to get it good, as some fine gents do to get good wine.'

Having thus far played the host, he went back again to his shop, making himself busy amongst his birds, and now and then engaging in laughable dialogue with his chatty parrot.

The colour presently came back into Hughie's face, and his eyes brightened a little, as he sat heartily enjoying his simple meal. The warmth was delightful to the benumbed, ill clad boy, after the pain of frost had left his fingers and toes; and sense of satisfaction would have been complete, had his mother been able to enjoy things as he did himself. But she seemed utterly listless, and did not care for tea and bread-and-butter, though she tried her best to swallow a few mouthfuls, more to please her boy than to gratify herself.

After a while, Matthew peeped in to see how they were getting on. They had both finished, and as his shining pate appeared in the doorway, Mrs. Haldane rose from her chair, and said gratefully, 'I thank you very much for myself and my little boy, for your great kindness to us. It is what I did not expect.'

'You are very welcome, and I hope you've both made a downright tea,' said Matthew, his face beaming with kindness. 'Don't be in a hurry to go, missis: sit still and rest a bit, and let the little chap have a good warm. It's a cold night to turn out, and he hasn't got a top-coat, I see. Sit still, both of ye, and I'll look in again in a few minutes.'

CHAP. VIII.—DORA'S SYMPATHY.

In about a quarter-of-an-hour, Matthew looked in again, and found Dora Haldane sitting in the same position, with her hands loosely clasped, and her head leant back against the high chair.

There was a bright flush in her face now, and her eyes were very bright, Matthew thought that the food and the fire had done her a world of good; and he felt pleased that he had found the opportunity of doing such a kind turn to a poor fellow-creature.

'Well missus,' he said, in his unpolished manner, yet not without respect in his tone, 'you look quite set up, you do. Have you got quite over yer trouble?'

'Yes, thank you, the faintness is

quite gone,' said Dora, as she sat up, and began gathering her shawl around her. 'And the little chap, he looks spry, to be sure. Have you had a good tuck in, my lad?' said Matthew, putting his hands on his knees, to stoop and look in the boy's face.

'He has made an excellent tea, many thanks to you,' answered his mother for him.

'I was jest goin' to give ye a shilling, ma'am, for singing them sweet songs, when you came tumblin' into my shop,' said Matthew, with a little diffidence in his manner. 'I hope you'll take it, and get the boy some little goody or other for Sunday. When I were a little chap, I allays expected somethin' extra of a Sunday; but now 'cept that I gets out for a good blow of fresh air on Sundays, them and the week-days is all alike to me; and no reason why they shouldn't be, neither.'

The last sentence grated harshly on Dora's ear. She fixed her large bright eyes on his face, and asked, with quiet concern, 'Why do you say that?'

'Well,' answered Matthew slowly, and with a scornful sort of expression, which Dora did not like, 'I've got reasons of my own for saying that, and a good many other things somethin' like it. I sets my face dead against cant, I do, and I ain't goin' to cant about the "holy Sabbath," and all that sort o' thing, ye know, in the pious line, when I don't believe in my heart nothin' about it. I admires Sunday for rest and change, I do, as much as anybody; and I only wish that folks wouldn't be such fools as to keep on money-grubbing seven days a week, instead of six, and hurry-scurrying about, as if there was no such word as rest in the dictionary, and as if their mortal bodies was made not to need it.'

'Ah,' said Dora, with a beaming smile, 'our Heavenly Father was wise and kind in this as in everything else, when He ordained the Sabbath for man, and bade him tend his soul on that day.'

'Wise and kind in everything!' retorted Matthew, almost fiercely. 'How you talk! I could tell you what He has done for me that wasn't kind and wise.'

Dora looked at him with pain and pity. He seemed to read her expression, and he went on bitterly, 'Yes, He spoiled all my life, and here I am a defiant old sinner of fifty-eight, lonely and desolate, when there was stuff in me to make one o' the best of men,—yes, though I says it myself it's true. What did your good Lord do, I s'pose you'd like to ask? Well, he gev me one o' the best of young wives as mortal man ever had, and one o' the loveliest of babies, and then He swept 'em both clean off at a stroke like, and left me as bare and as rent and as worthless as a tree blasted by lightning. There! Now you needn't preach to me about love and wisdom, till you've felt somethin' like that.'

'I have felt something like that,' answered Dora, calmly, and the tears gathered in her eyes as she spoke. 'I too, have seen a darling child and one of the best of husbands swept away; but thank God! that has not made me defiant and miserable. Indeed, if you are miserable it is because you are defiant, because you have not allowed that sore trouble to work the good in you that your Father in Heaven meant it to do. Don't you know what the Bible says about "unto the froward all things are pure"?'

'The Bible!' exclaimed Matthew in a tone that conveyed the utmost scorn, 'The Bible's nothing to me. I've had none of it for thirty year, and I ain't goin' to have, that's more!'

'Ah, I see how it is with you, if you'll forgive me for saying so,' replied Dora in a soft, sad tone: 'it's because your heart is froward that the good Lord seems froward to you. If you could look at Him through a different medium He would appear to you as He does to me,—my wise and loving Friend, my Strength, my Comforter, the God in whom I trust for time and for eternity, and to whom I trust my precious boy now I am expecting death to take me away from him.'

Matthew did not speak for several seconds, but looked at her with a strange mixture of awe and incredulity. At last he said, 'So do you really think you're goin' to die? But, before she could answer, he went on in a lighter tone, 'Ah, but you women think you're goin' to die directly you have a bit of a

AAR faint like the die, never ought to do such a night get home a good rest, a new start 'No,' said no more n in the stre to-night to morrow. give me w content. for when his head f into Matthe 'Do you h place, wit be fit for 'I don' swered M to call in passing b 'Thank Hughie's kitchen round an feathered grew mo large ca beaks of were in not ever wings. this cam they ha pair? bu about fr 'Poor as if to for their I'd buy 'And doing 'e thew. times w blessed cages th 'I sup said Do 'Som plied M by a ch and rar selves Bless 'e noses a lot of 'much.' Dora ferers v and sh them is 'Abg Matthe are of there v want o 'em ye catingl proach off the stand. in a ge profess It w and a Matthe of his gradua by wi agains for lib in des cruel kind: such that h he ha wards of pit ened s his ne This const hard ing' inflic This who the fi are in in the nerv ing a wher cess be p out t factio hum If th hum unne brea men form ant, It to p eou thei