

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, May 6th, 1877.—The Famine in Samaria.—2 Kings vii. 12-20.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 17-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. Luke xviii. 27.

DAILY READING.—Monday, 2 Kings vi. 24-33; vii. 1-20. Tuesday, vs. 12; Joshua viii. 3-19. Wednesday, vs. 13; Job v. Thursday, vs. 13; Jeremiah xv. Friday, vs. 15; Genesis xii. 25-57. Saturday, vs. 19; John xx. 24-29. Sunday, Psalm cv.

ANALYSIS.—I. The king suspects a trick. Vs. 12. II. Report of scouts. Vs. 13-15. III. The people rush for the prey. Vs. 15. IV. Elisha's word fulfilled. Vs. 17-20.

QUESTIONS.—How did Syria repay the mercifulness of Elisha? What calamity, added to Syrian invasion, had now overtaken Israel? Who sent it? For what? How great was the stress of the famine? What contracts did mothers make at the time? What quarrels did they have? Jehoram hitherto has asked advice of Elisha (ch. vi. 21); how does he now treat the prophet? When ill overtake a people, why is blame ever heaped upon God's ministers? How does Elisha make self-defence? ch. vi. 32. Does it lessen Jehoram's impatience? vs. 33. What strange good news does Elisha now utter? Who disbelieves it? In what words? How does God bring about plenty? vs. 3, etc. What does he make the hosts of Syria to hear? vs. 6. After what selfish acts do these lepers report the Syrian flight to Israel? Vs. 12. What trick does Jehoram suspect? What similar stratagem in the Bible did he possibly recall? Vs. 13. What test was now tried? Why was there little risk in it? Vs. 14. Did they really take "two chariot horses"? If not, what? Vs. 15. Why did the search extend to the Jordan? Vs. 16. How far did the people spoil the Syrian tents? How much was a measure of fine flour? How little was it worth on this day of plenty? How much barley could be bought for the same money? What prophecy was now fulfilled? What is the Golden Text? Vs. 17. Whose fate is now to be described? How did Jehoram honor him? What happened to him at the gate? Whose word was now fulfilled?

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—We come to events more interesting than fiction. "Not many good turns are written in marble; soon have these Syrians forgotten the merciful action of Israel." Ch. vi. 21-23. On the principle of returning evil for good, they return to the invasion of Samaria (vs. 24), to find famine brought upon Israel. For what cause but for idolatry? By whom? by Jehovah, or by his servant, Elisha? The extent of the famine was dreadful; things not eatable in their nature became dear and dainty; mothers covenanted with each other to slay their children in turn for food, and had quarrels if either party broke her pledge. vs. 26-29. Jehoram, arguing from Elisha's miracles that he could deliver Israel from such a terrible famine if he liked, in the spirit of his mother, Jezebel, and almost in her words concerning Elijah (1 Kings xix. 2), threatened to take Elisha's head. vs. 31. Hearing of which, Elisha provided for his safety, but the king was impatient. "Behold this evil" (famine) "is of the Lord," and Elisha is his heedless prophet; "what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" But oh, the mercy of God is everlasting. Elisha had now good news for Jehoram, "the son of the murderer"—news of plenty in the land before another day had passed. This was incredible to the lord on whom the king leaned: "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven"—send another deluge of bread like that of water—"this might be." Plenty would come, however, though this lord partook of it not; for his unbelief he would have to die. But how did the Lord bring plenty to Samaria? By the unwitting service of four lepers. In the extremity of the famine they decided to enter the Syrian camp; it was death out of this camp, it would be no more than death in it. On coming to the outermost tents, "behold, there was no man." It was all silence and solitude. God had put a panic into the hearts of the Syrians, and they had fled, leaving untold plenty behind them.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 12.—The king

arose in the night. See vs. 11. The lepers went to the Syrian camp "in the night." The evening, not morning twilight; but yet evidently quite late in evening, later than the word twilight would at first suggest to us. They spent some time at the camp (vs. 8, 9) so that it was now in the dead of night. His servants. High officers, civil or military, probably both. A consultation would speedily follow such strange tidings. I will now show you, etc. The king's suspicion was most reasonable. Joshua viii. 3-19. "Hungry." Famished is more exact, as the Hebrew has the same root with the word for famine. Samaria, we have already learned, was on a hill, and not easily taken except by some such method as that suspected.

Verse 13.—One of his servants. High officers, as in vs. 12. Five of the horses. The custom was to have two, and some times three horses attached to a single chariot. Thus would be used the "five horses." The horses as well as the asses (vi. 25) had been killed for food. These five had thus far been spared, and apparently only these five. Behold, they are as all the multitude, etc. Language of very similar import to that of the lepers in vs. 4. It was a most hazardous enterprise for these men thus to go out. Capture was almost certain, and death next to inevitable. But then, what of it? Even at that the party going out were no worse off than those staying.

Verse 14.—Go and see. To test the king's theory, as stated in vs. 12. Verse 15.—Unto [the] Jordan. "The Syrians had fled probably by the great road which led from Samaria to Damascus through Geba, &c. It crosses the Jordan about thirty-five miles northeast of Samaria. All the way was full of garments, etc. The horses and asses of the Syrians were left behind (vs. 7). Flight was instant, each starting with such treasure as he had in hand or at hand, though generally nothing was taken. Vs. 8.

Verse 16.—The people went out, etc. The whole population appears to have gone out to feast and "spoil," indiscriminately. See vs. 17. The news of the Syrian stampede would spread through Samaria like wild-fire, and the starving wretches must have rushed out with almost a mad delirium of eagerness. No doubt others than he whom the prophet's word had marked for this fate were trodden to death in that wild hour. A measure of fine flour. A measure or sack "was probably equal to about a peck and a half English." The shekel has been estimated at "about sixty-two and a half cents." The price here given was high for flour and grain in ordinary times, yet it was incredibly cheap in view of the situation at the time when the prediction was spoken. vi. 25.

Verse 17.—The king appointed the lord, etc. The "lord," or officer mentioned in vs. 2. In such a time of universal frenzy control was simply impossible. The expression "on whose hand he leaned" designates rank near the king. The people trod upon him, etc. The crush of the crowd would be great at the gate. Why is this man's death mentioned, while all the rest of the dead are passed unnoticed? Not that he was greatest, or worst, but simply to teach us how sure is the word of God. That lord doubtless paid no great heed to the prophet's message—in the rush and crush forgot it, but God remembered. He forgets nothing. Not a promise fails to fall, not a threatening. It is fulfilled to the full.

Verse 18.—And it came to pass, etc. The lesson was weighty, he must pause to note thus explicitly the exact and complete correspondence of the predictive word, and predicted event. He did not overestimate the value of the lesson, and the difficulty of teaching it. "In the gate" is equivalent to "in the market."

Verse 19.—Windows in heaven. This "lord" seems clearly to have had in mind Gen. vii. 11; viii. 2, and thus to have conceived of a flood of grain. He assumed that such a flood was utterly incredible, but not a whit more so than any other means of copious supply. He believed not.

Verse 20.—And so it fell, etc. Mark the solemn emphasis of this final assertion of the proved truth of God's word.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, May 13th, 1877.—Jehu the King.—2 Kings x. 20-31.

The Story of the Lesson

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

The Lord frightened away the Syrians. Four lepers who were outside the city, thought if they went to the Syrians, perhaps they would give them something to eat. The poor lepers said, "If they kill us, we can only die; for if we stay here, we shall die, anyhow." When they came to the camp, no one was there. They went through the tents eating and drinking, and taking out silver and gold; till at last they said, "If we do not go and tell this good news we shall get into trouble when the morning light comes." So they went to the gate, and told the man in charge. He called to the other porter inside who told it to the king's servants, and they woke the king. When he heard it, he said, "The Syrians are playing us a trick. They know we are hungry, and they have hid themselves till we come out. Then they will catch us." One of his servants said, "Let some men take the few horses that are left, and go and see." So Jehoram let them take two of his chariot horses. They went as far as Jordan, and found the road strewn with clothing and jars which the Syrians had dropped. They told the king, and the people rushed out to the tents. That very day food was sold for the price Elisha had said. Elisha's words about the unbelieving lord were also true; for he was trodden to death by the crowd.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XIII.—HUGHIE FINDS A HOME. "Come in, come in," repeated Matthew, as he opened the door and went into the dim shop. Hughie's brief announcement had given him quite a shock, and he felt awed and really sad as he led the way through the shop, repeating absently, "Ay, come in, come in, poor lad!"

When they had entered the back room, which was much lighter, Matthew suddenly turned round saying, as he confronted Hughie, "Dead, did you say she was? When? how did it happen?"

Hughie had begun crying again when the kind words, "Come in, poor lad!" uttered in the most sympathizing tone, fell from Matthew's lips. It was the first kind word he had heard that day; and that day was the first one in his life that he had missed hearing terms of fond endearment addressed to himself. He sobbed hysterically, and for some time could not manage to get out a word. Matthew sat down in his chair, drew the boy to his side, and putting his big hand gently on his shoulder, said, "Now, try to give over, my little chap! Though ye may well cry at losin' such a sweet critter as she. Ah I know what it is, I know what it is! But all the cryin' in the world, all the longin' won't fetch her back; and that's no comfort to ye, I guess, to tell ye that. But it's truth; and all you've got to do is to bear it like a brave boy, though it's hard; ah, yes, it's very hard."

Matthew's eyes twinkled, and he rose from his chair and went out into the little back-kitchen, where Hughie heard him cough huskily, and sniff several times. The boy's new grief had opened an old wound in his heart, which he thought time had healed; and the tide of grief which he hoped had ebbed for ever, flowed over him for a few minutes again almost as strong as when he had first felt overwhelmed by the loss of one as sweet, and as gentle as Dora Haldane.

He stayed out in the back-kitchen where Hughie's storm of grief had spent itself, and the sobs had subsided. Then he came back, and sat down in his big chair again, close beside the boy, who was sitting sideways on a small chair.

"I guess you've done cryin' now," he said kindly. "And now jest be a right-down brave lad and tell me all about it, and what you've come here for, and what you are goin' to do. I was wishin' last night as I might see you again, but I didn't think I were goin' to see you so soon, and without yer mother. Bless me! ain't it writ somewhere as there's but a step 'twixt death and we? Well that's truth, if ever truth was writ anywhere. Only a step! and yer poor, dear mother have took that same step jest since last night! Dear me! what a

queer old world it is for sech things to be allays happenin'. Well, to be sure! he further ejaculated in an absent manner, and for some moments he was lost in thought.

Hughie sat looking at him, and in a minute Matthew looked up and met his sorrowful gaze. "Well, little chap, are you goin' to tell me about yer trouble?" he said.

"Yes answered Hughie. "She died some time in the night, I don't know what of; but when I woke up this morning she was dead. I think it must have been the cold that did it. It was dreadful cold last night, and mother wouldn't come to bed when I did. I suppose she got too cold to undress herself, and so she died. And, please sir, Mrs. Barish was very cross about it."

About what? interrupted Matthew sharply.

"Because she died in her house, sir. She seems ever so frightened of her, and won't go near her. And she says she'll have her sent off to the workhouse pretty soon, and me too; and oh, please sir, I can't go! I must run away somewhere, though I don't know were to go. So I went just now before I came out, and kissed her, and wished her good-bye: she's lying on the bed waiting to be taken away and buried, and I shan't see her ever any more! Oh, dear! I wish I could find grandmother! I don't know what I shall do!" And the boy burst into tears again, and sobbed as badly as before.

"Humph!" ejaculated Matthew after a few moments' consideration, during which his eyes winked quickly and grew moist. "So this landlady ha'n't bin very kind to ye?"

"No, she wasn't a bit kind to mother," sobbed Hughie, "only just to let us sit by her fire now and then, when we were so dreadful cold we didn't know what to do. And now mother's dead, I never saw anybody so goss as she is to me. But I can't let her have me shut up in the workhouse! Do tell me what I'd better do, and where I'd better go to! You promised mother last night as you'd think about it, and you said we might call again. I remembered that just now, when I couldn't tell where to run to away from Mrs. Barish, and so I thought I'd come and ask you if you've thought of anything yet."

"Well, I've thought of ye both most o' the time since you was last here," replied Matthew. "But I never thought to see ye come back like this, and all by yerself, running into my den for help like a hunted rabbit. But I'll tell ye what you shall do," added Matthew, his face suddenly lighting up with benevolence, "I'll tell ye what you shall do, my little chap—why, you shall jest stay here along of me, till you finds a better place to go to! At any rate this is better than the workus, ain't it now? and me and you and my old Tom'll get on fast-rate for a bit, you'll see!"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed Hughie, earnestly; and a delightful feeling of restfulness, of freedom from anxiety, filled his little heart. He sighed deeply, and brushed away his tears with his jacket-sleeve, and looked round the place which, for a time at least, he was to call home, with the greatest satisfaction. Matthew was gazing before him lost in thought; but his reverie did not last many seconds. His face was still beaming as he turned towards Hughie, saying, "And what's more, they ain't goin' to hustle that poor thing off to the workus as if she was a born pauper, not if Matthew Pedder can help it! I had jest sich a sweet critter of my own to put by once upon a time, and I know how yer father must ha' felt if he'd lived to see this day, my lad. So I'll jest bury her decent for ye, and have her put where you can go and call the place yer own; and though it'll take gold to do it, and she's nothin' to me, nor you either, yet I'll do it and trust to ye to pay me back, if ye can, when ye grows up and gets on in life. But I couldn't abear the sight of ye afore my face day after day, remindin' me of her poor pale face, and her sweet hymn-singin'—I couldn't abear it if I thought as she was tossed into a pauper's grave. So look'ee here: jest put yer hat on again and off we'll start at once to put that 'ere out o' the question. I'll go and tell Mrs. Bear—what's-her-name, that she needn't trouble herself no more about that poor body: I'll take all the sponsibility myself."

For a few moments Hughie hesitated, fearing that this was a trick to betray him into the hands of the workhouse officials; and he looked up into Matthew's face with a keen, enquiring expression. But he read there only kindness, and the tear which he saw trembling in the corner of Matthew's eye restored his confidence in him; and he stood up and put on his old hat. More over he thought of the shilling which he had given to his mother yesterday, and of the food and temporary shelter he had also freely given; and the boy said to himself, that what Matthew had given yesterday, he was doubtless ready to give to-day, and perhaps for many days to come.

They went out together, and Matthew locked the shop-door and put the key in his pocket. He did not attempt to take Hughie's hand, but he kept talking to him all the way, and looking at him now and then with a kindly smile.

In about an hour he might have been seen re-entering his old shop with the boy, having successfully accomplished his errand to Mrs. Barish.

If any of his neighbours had seen and known that Matthew Pedder was taking the boy into his house that day as his protégé, they would have felt inclined to pity the lad; and had they known that his mother had prayed with intense solicitude that he might be tenderly and carefully provided for after her death they would have thought that her prayer was far from being answered when Hughie found a home with Matthew. For he was regarded by the majority of his neighbours with dislike and extreme suspicion. Many of them were Jews, and these thought him worse than a heathen; his "Christian" neighbours, who, by-the-way, knew as little of real Christianity as the man in the moon, regarded him as a selfish, half-savage infidel, with whom it was best to have nothing to do. But the fact was, that during all the years that Matthew had lived in that house in utter loneliness, he had brusquely repelled all the advances of his neighbours, and had let them plainly know that he wished to have nothing to do with them.

This being not very flattering to them, they came to persuade themselves that it was they who repelled and shunned him: not he who repelled and shunned them. And they whispered and tattled about him, and made him out to be a sinner of a very much deeper dye than he really was. But he held on his own eccentric and lonely way, quite indifferent to the wagging of their malicious tongues, quite content to keep himself to himself, as few but Englishmen can.

Since his beloved Patty's death no living soul had seen below the surface of his nature; and that surface, as presented to his neighbours and fellow-creatures generally was, it must be admitted, anything but gracious and attractive. And no one of those who assumed that they knew all about him, would have envied little Hugh Haldane that cold, dark Sunday afternoon as he entered Matthew Pedder's house, and ventured to say to himself that at last he had found a place which he could call home.

CHAP. XIV.—GETTING SETTLED.

It is doubtful whether Dora herself would have felt even the smallest satisfaction in seeing her beloved boy taken under Matthew Pedder's wing, to be daily and hourly under his influence. Had she known all about his opinions, she would have pronounced him anything but a fit person to have charge of a boy like Hughie. But he who gives His angels charge concerning the little ones, was to guard the boy, in answer to his mother's believing prayers, from all harm while with Matthew, and to bestow upon him much blessing.

From the first it was likely that Matthew would do him more good than harm; for in the very hour of making his acquaintance Matthew had the better feelings of his nature awakened, which had been slumbering for years; and it seemed probable that his young protégé would, in the future, foster these, rather than the lower and contrary part of his nature, which had been largely developed ever since that trouble came upon him in early life, of which he had spoken to Dora.

On the memorable Sunday evening when Hughie took up his abode with Matthew, the old man acted in a manner that would have astonished his slanderous neighbours beyond measure could they but have seen him.