

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, March 11th, 1877. — Elijah Translated.—2 Kings ii. 1-12.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 8-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Genesis v. 24.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 2 Kings ii. 1-12. Tuesday, 2 Kings i. 1-17. Wednesday, vs. 1; 1 Kings xix. 15-21. Thursday, vs. 2; Genesis xxxii. 21-32. Friday, vs. 3; 1 Samuel xix. 9-24. Saturday, vs. 9; John xiv. 9-14. Sunday, vs. 28; Matt. xvii. 1-13.

ANALYSIS.—I. Elisha following Elijah. Vs. 1-6. II. Elijah dividing the Jordan. Vs. 7, 8. III. Elisha's request. Vs. 9, 10. IV. Elisha's ascension. Vs. 11, 12.

QUESTIONS.—What is to you the strongest proof that there is a future life?

Vs. 1. Where was Elijah last seen? 2 Kings i. What severe work did he perform again at Carmel? Where was Gilgal?

Vs. 2. Why did Elijah bid Elisha to tarry at Gilgal? Why did Elisha refuse to do so?

Vs. 3. Who were these sons of the prophets? Where were they assembled? Of how many such schools have we a Scriptural record? Why was sacred learning then a power for good? Why is it now?

Vs. 6. Why are the great things God does for his church not done in secret? Give examples of these great things done openly.

Vs. 7. Why did these fifty men go as far as they did toward the Jordan? Why no farther?

Vs. 8. When were the waters of the Jordan divided before?

Vs. 9. What has Jesus bidden us to do? John xiv. 13. Did Elisha ask for just double the spirit and power of Elijah? If not, for what? What does this indicate respecting Elisha's character?

Vs. 10. How are all spiritual attainments conditioned?

Vs. 11. How was Elijah parted from Elisha? How taken up into heaven? What is meant here by heaven?

Vs. 12. Why this cry of Elisha? Where do we hear of Elijah again. Matt. xvii. 1-13. Was not Elijah, then, conscious after death?

ELIJAH'S ASCENSION.—We now come to one of the grandest scenes of the Bible. Socrates, when about to die, said, in reference to his soul "we part; I am going to die, and you to live. Which of us goes the better way is known to God alone." Writing upon the future state, Cicero said, "Upon this subject I entertain no more than conjectures." But the Bible is full of intelligence respecting the future world. The Bible confirms its translations by transfiguration scenes, in which the spirits of the departed mingle with the living. The Bible tells us of many mansions, and bids the suffering ones of earth, in the sure hope of eternal glory, exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" The Bible brings life and immortality to light through Jesus Christ.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 1.—When the Lord [Jehovah] would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind. This is the first hint given us of the divine purpose. "Heaven" in this verse means the blue heights above us. The usual mode of announcing a man's death in those times is given in 1 Kings xxii. 40, 50. Compare Gen. xlix. 33. It is not uncommon for us to speak of any good man's death as a removal to heaven, but this mode of speech was unknown to the Hebrews. It seems from Gen. v. 22, and Heb. xi. 5, that Enoch's end was similar to that of Elijah. The resemblance to the Saviour's ascension is sufficiently obvious. That Moses "saw death" and was literally buried, is made certain by Deut. xxxiv. 5-7. The word translated "whirlwind" signifies rather a storm or tempest—here perhaps a thunder-storm. Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. See 1 Kings xix. 19-21. The Gilgal here meant is not that of Josh. iv. 20, near where Joshua set up the twelve stones after the passage of the Jordan, but is "on the mountains of Ephraim, about eight and a-half miles," to the north of Bethel.

Verse 2.—Tarry here I pray thee, for the Lord [Jehovah] hath sent me to Bethel. Elijah knew by revelation how this journey was to end, though it is equally clear that he did not know

either that to Elisha too the same revelation had been made, or that Elisha was to remain with him. Why Elijah was sent to Bethel is not stated, but the connection makes it clear that it was because there was a "school of the prophets," and this, his last visit, was to be for their comfort. As the Lord [Jehovah] liveth, etc. Not disobedience, nor a refusal to heed his master's request. Elisha knew what was to be, and his own spirit moved also by the Divine Spirit, forbade him to leave Elijah. So they went, etc. Elijah for the present consenting. On the distance, descent, and direction, see above on vs. 1. Bethel is some twelve miles north of Jerusalem, between Jerusalem and Gilgal, and, as will be remembered, is the south city of the kingdom of Israel, in which Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves.

Verse 3.—The sons of the prophets that were in Bethel. These "schools of the prophets" seem to have been originated by Samuel. 1 Sam. xix. 19, 20; x. 12. See vs. 5; iv. 38; vi. 1. "So successful were these institutions, that from the time of Samuel to the closing of the Canon of the Old Testament, there seems never to have been wanting a due supply of men to keep up the line of efficient prophets." Knowest thou, etc. Evidently, to them, as also, to the prophets at Jericho (vs. 5), Elijah's end had been separately revealed. They speak to Elisha apart, "out of the abundance of their heart," not knowing that he, too, was already filled with the same thought and sorrow. "To take from thy head" does not mean to carry up above thy head into heaven, but to remove from headship over these. Compare Acts xxii. 3. Yea, I know it, hold thy peace. Sorrow, and sympathy too awful for language.

Verse 4.—Compare on vs. 2. Jericho lay some fifteen miles, nearly to the east.

Verse 5, 6.—The explanation of vs. 3 and 4, holds for these. Jericho is six miles west of the Jordan, and is celebrated as the first city taken by the Israelites after entering Palestine, or rather taken for them by Jehovah. Josh. vi.

Verse 7.—Fifty men. That these societies were at this time left undisturbed, is explained by iii. 2, for Jehoram was reigning at this time. See above vs. 1, and the citations. Elijah's ministry had borne peaceable and righteous fruits, and he had lived to see and enjoy some of them. Afar off. Literally "over against afar," that is, in a position commanding a view of the Jordan and the land beyond, thus enabling them to watch the course of the two, and perhaps to view the final scene. They two stood by Jordan. At or near the place where the Israelites entered Canaan.

Verse 8.—Elijah took his mantle, etc. Instead of "wrapped" we should read "rolled." He rolled it closely together, and then made use of it somewhat as Moses did of his rod in the performance of his miracles. They were divided, etc. See Josh. iii. 11-17.

Verse 9.—Ask what I shall do, etc. The dictate of love. Elijah had not any suspicion what the request would be. The clinging love of Elisha in following him, and refusing to be separated, had impressed him. I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. The key to the interpretation of this is given in Deut. xxi. 17, in connection with 1 Kings xix. 16, 19-21. From the former we learn that the first born received a double inheritance in token of his position as the first-born, and so the recognized head of the family on the death of the father. So Elisha knowing himself to be designated as Elijah's successor, wishes to receive that qualification and recognition which would enable him to take and fill the place of the departing "father" and "master."

Verse 10.—Thou hast asked a hard thing. It was "hard," as quite out of Elijah's power to give, for such qualification was God's gift. This, of course, Elisha knew, but yet he was but honest in stating the one greatest desire of his heart; and besides, he knew that Elijah had power to intercede with God, and that as through him he had been appointed as successor, so through him, also, he might be empowered. If thou see me, etc. A condition which was as little in the power of either of the men, as was the favor asked in Elijah's power.

Verse 11.—Still went on. From the

bed of the Jordan on the east. And talked. Doubtless in words of solemn and weighty import. But it does not follow that men's conversation will be of importance simply because they know themselves to be face to face with death. Behold there appeared a chariot of fire, etc. The words "there appeared" are in italics in our Common Version, and are better omitted. The suddenness, and strangeness of the occurrence will thus be better emphasized. Fire, or its brightness, as we have often seen, symbolized God's presence. The form of the fiery appearance befitted the present work of God. Compare also vi. 14. Elijah had not been wont to ride in the chariot even of an earthly king. Once we saw him running before Ahab's. Now, how changed. Elijah went up, etc. "Bodily" teaching the doctrine of immortality, and pointing us to the final reception of all the sons of God, both those to be raised from the dead and those to be "changed" in a moment." 1 Thess. iv. 17.

Verse 12.—My father, etc. The official title of Elijah as Elisha's chief. Emphatic repetition. The chariots, etc. Usually understood of Elijah himself as having been the nation's defence. The language clearly was occasioned by the fiery chariot and horses, and would better be understood of Jehovah as revealing himself in connection with his prophet. The man was nothing. God working through him was all. Rent his clothes. In token of grief. Thenceforth he wrought in his Master's power, from the parting of Jehovah's waters to the end. —Baptist Teacher.

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

THE STORY FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

Elijah went from place to place, paying his last visits. Elisha went with him, though Elijah begged him to stay at Gilgal, where they started from, saying that the Lord had sent him to Bethel. But Elisha said, "I will not leave thee." At Bethel some of the young men asked Elisha whether he knew that the Lord was going to take away his master that day. He said, "Yes, I know; be still." Elijah said, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But Elisha still said, "I will not leave thee." At the school at Jericho some more young men asked the same question. Elisha made the same answer, and again refused to leave Elijah. So they both went on till they stood by the Jordan, while fifty of the sons of the prophets stood afar off on a hill to watch. Elijah took off his cloak, wrapped it together, all struck the water with it. The river divided in the middle, and the two went over on dry ground. After they were over Elijah said to his friend, "What shall I do for thee before I am taken away from thee?" Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. His master said that he had asked a hard thing; but if he saw him as he was taken up, it should be so. As they were talking, a chariot and horses of fire came between them and carried Elijah up to heaven.

Select Serial.

From Day of Rest. DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

I.—DISAPPOINTED SEEKERS.

On a fair, still evening, early in October, many years ago, a woman of about thirty years of age and a boy of eight, were slowly walking hand in hand through the green lanes of a village in Kent. The woman looked both weak and weary, and was evidently very poor. Her black dress was rusty and much mended, and the hand of Time had nipped the edges of her thin shawl, leaving only a fragment of fringe here and there, which looked more like rags than trimming. Her bonnet was also black, much tumbled and faded, but it was put on with care; and the sad sweet face which it surrounded, and the air of quiet dignity with which she bore herself, seemed to proclaim to those who observed her that this poor woman had seen better days, and was no ordinary tramp.

For this mother and child were on the tramp to London, and very tired they both were with their day's journey.

The boy's toes peeped through his dusty old shoes, and he limped slightly in spite of his brave efforts to walk so that his mother might not know how sore his feet were. Her mind was too pre-occupied to notice him much; she had that day suffered a great disappointment, and she walked along in a very dejected frame of mind, concerned about their to-day, and far too anxious about their morrow. Yet who among us would have strong faith if placed in her circumstances? She had no home, no money, no earthly friends; she was frail and fading in body; what wonder then that despondency should frequently reign in her soul? Yet she was self-reliant and content; for during past years of sorrow and trouble, she had learned to lean on a Heavenly Helper and Comforter, and had found help and comfort according to her need.

In her early life she had been left fatherless, in the charge of a hard, selfish mother whose only child she was. She had inherited her father's sweetness of disposition and poetic temperament, which caused her to be very sensitive to her mother's unkindness during the years of childhood and early womanhood. This cloud over her life depressed her and made her older than her years; but by-and-by a strong, bright gleam of sunshine burst upon her, and suddenly the grey of her life was turned to gold, which she fondly believed would last for ever.

In the Kentish village where she had been brought up, she met, with a young Scotchman named Haldane, who was sent down from London with a party of workmen to superintend the painting and decorating of a grand family mansion there. From the first her mother set her face against the intimacy, frowned upon it, and finally forbade it. What did she know about this smart young fellow from London? He might be an unprincipled adventurer for aught she knew. Very likely he was married, she said, and if he wasn't he ought to be, for he was certainly past thirty. Then he was a Scotchman, and she had always hated both Scotch and Irish. Why couldn't her daughter wait a few years, and then marry a decent Englishman, as she had done herself. A girl of nineteen needn't be thinking of marriage, when she had a comfortable home under her mother's roof, and a business at her fingers which was bringing her in plenty of good money.

Dora talked and reasoned with her mother, so did her lover in bold, manly fashion; but it was all in vain. Then they decided to wait a year or two to see if she would come round; and if not, said Hugh Haldane, "though I've always stood up for duty to parents, and always will, yet I think, Dora, that at the end of two years, filial duty will not stand between you and me."

Dora's mother did not relent. She could give no satisfactory reason for her dislike of Hugh Haldane; for he made known to her all about himself and his relations, so that she was satisfied as to his good character and respectability. But the contrariness of her nature made her withstand him: she wanted Dora, when she should consider that the proper time had arrived, to marry somebody after her own heart, of her choosing, and not to choose for herself, young and inexperienced as she was.

But Dora, after patient waiting, married Hugh Haldane, and her mother refused to give blessing or sanction. The young people went away to Edinburgh where Hugh got a good appointment; and for years Dora wrote regularly to her mother, trying in vain to get a response and to effect a reconciliation, till at last she gave up in despair and wrote no more.

At the end of ten years Dora found herself, after many vicissitudes, in the condition in which we have just seen her, a widow in the depth of poverty, sadly making her way to London. For six or seven years the sun of prosperity shone upon her and her husband, and they were very happy. Then affliction came: a darling child was snatched away, and her husband had a long, lingering illness from which he never recovered. Dora battled bravely with adversity for a time, but her sensitive and delicate nature soon succumbed to the trials of poverty; and at last one long-looked-for possession of her,—to go back to her mother to die.

She had a message to carry to her, a sweet lesson to teach her, which she had learned in the furnace of affliction, and which she knew would bless her mother, if she would but learn it, even as it had blessed herself.

And then her little Hugh might be safely and happily provided for, she thought; if her mother were the true and good woman she yet ardently hoped to see her; her bright boy might find shelter under his grandmother's wing. These considerations kept her up during the days and weeks which they spent in journeying southwards. Sometimes they were helped on a stage or two by train; but for the most part the journey was done on foot.

Having at length arrived at the old village-home, she found that her mother had left about a year previously for London. Her sight had suddenly failed, and she could no longer work at the straw business, at which she and Dora used to work together. This was told Dora by a woman living in her old home, a perfect stranger to her! Indeed all the people about there seemed to be strangers: old faces had for the most part passed away; the whole aspect of the place was changed; where before were wide green fields studded with cattle, grand mansions and elegant villas now stood; the green lanes were made into fine roads with paved footpaths, and by the introduction of a railway through the village, it had become rather a fashionable suburb of London than the quiet, out-of-the-world country-place it had been in Dora's youth.

She asked many questions of this stranger woman; but could elicit nothing further than that the former tenant of the cottage was now living in the neighbourhood of Spitalfields. With a heart heavy with disappointment, yet determined to make one more effort to reach her mother, Dora took her boy's hand and turned away from her old home.

"Why couldn't we stay at that little house all night, mother?" he asked, with a wistful tone and look that made her heart more heavy; the homeless child had a strong, instinctive longing for a home and a sure resting-place.

"They are strangers; they would not take us in, love," she answered, with quiet sadness.

Presently he said, "Don't you think she might have asked us inside to sit down for a little minute?"

Then the mother looked down at him and noticed his pitiful limping. "My darling Hughie!" she said, tenderly, "your poor little feet are very tired. I wish I could carry you! Come across the road, and let us sit down under those beautiful trees a little while, and then we shall be able to go on better."

"Where to, mother?" "I don't know, love. God has led us all this way, and He will lead us to the end."

"What is the end, mother? Where is it?" he asked, in the same wistful tone.

She hesitated a moment or two, and then replied, with an attempt to smile down at his anxious, upturned face, "We must wait and see, my dear boy."

(To be Continued.)

Not long since a colored woman obtained a position in a Southern family as cook. A few days afterward she met an acquaintance, who inquired how she liked her new place.

"Ise gwine to leab 'em," was the answer.

"Dey 'buses you, does dey?"

"Dreffu! Wuss den foah de 'bellion! Dey loks up all de pervisions and asks foah de change from de market money."

"Why, dat's no better than stealin'!" was the indignant answer.

A good suggestion.—Every police station should have a stomach-pump (says the Pittsburg Commercial), to be brought into use whenever an inebriate is carried in. It would awake him to consciousness in double-quick time and tend to prevent his undergoing the same experience more than twice a week.

In the village at Harbottle, Northumberland, no child has died during the last twenty years; a farmer and his three shepherds have between them forty-seven children, and during the past thirty years not a death has occurred in their families.

At the sale of curiosities in New York the other day a fragment of the tomb of Aaron was knocked down for ten cents. Public faith in relics of the Holy Land was sadly shattered by the Oriental bazaar, at the Centennial.