

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lesson for 1878.

SUNDAY, October 20th, 1878. — The Prodigal Son. Luke xv. 11-24.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 17, 20.

GOLDEN TEXT. — "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying. O my God." Ps. xl. 17.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Luke xv. 1-32. Tuesday, Job xxi 14-20. Wednesday, John iv. 10-14. Thursday, 1 John i. 7-10. Friday, Leviticus xi. 1-8. Saturday, Genesis iv. 1-15. Sunday, Psalm li.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Self dependence. Vss. 11, 12. II. Waste. Vss. 13. III. Destitution. Vss. 14-16. IV. Conscious misery. Vss. 17. V. Resolution. Vss. 18, 19. VI. Home again. Vss. 20-24.

QUESTIONS.—I. Vss. 11, 12.—Why is the parable of the prodigal spoken? Vs. 2. How do the two sons differ in character? Why does the younger request his portion of his father's goods? How does this request illustrate the case of the sinner?

11. Vs. 13.—Are sinners distant from God in space or in affections? How did the prodigal live riotously? Vs. 30.

13. Vs. 14-16.—To what destitution did the prodigal now come? To what does all this spiritually refer? John iv. 14. How may we know whose servants we are? Rom. vi. 16. To what work was he put? How degrading was this? Lev. xi. 7, 8; Deut. xiv. 8. What food was he ready to eat?

14. Vs. 17.—What is meant by "when he came to himself"? Psalm cxix. 59.

15. Vs. 18.—What is meant by "I will arise"? What shows his penitence to have been divinely wrought? Comp. Psalm li. 4; 2 Cor. vii. 10.

16. Vs. 20-24.—What took place on the way of the prodigal to his home and at home? What is meant by "was dead"? 1 Tim. v. 6; Rom. vi. 13. Who besides men rejoice over penitent souls? Luke xv. 7.

The debasement of man is of his own making. Hos. xiii. 9.—His recovery is solely of God. Rom. v. 20, 21; ix. 16.

As Jesus journeyed on, great multitudes followed him, whom he addressed upon self-denial. xiv. 25-35. Among these multitudes, "publicans and sinners" in large numbers came to hear him, against whom the Scribes and Pharisees murmured that he should receive them and eat with them. xv. 1, 2. He proceeded, therefore, to utter several parables—that of the Lost Sheep, of the Lost Piece of Silver, and of the Prodigal Son, the last of which, "the heart and crown of all the parables of Scripture," is our Bible lesson to-day.

EXPOSITION.—Compare the two kindred parables preceding this. Vs. 2-10.

Verse 11.—A certain man.—Representing God. Two sons. The connection requires us to understand by these the two general classes of Jews before him. The moral religious class, represented by the Pharisees, and the immoral despised, represented by "publicans and sinners." The same principle holds as to the relation of Jews to Gentiles, and as to the religious part of Christendom to its outcast classes.

Verse 12.—Father give me, etc.—According to Jewish law the younger would inherit one-half as much as the elder. This may signify that those having the less advantages were, and are, likely the sooner to break away from religious restraints. His wish to be his own master, and have his own way with whatever could be got into his possession, is the spirit of the request, as it is the very essence or root of all sin. The sinner breaking out of the restraints of God's law in order to have the free enjoyment of God's gifts does not conscientiously and formally put up to him this prayer, but this is his secret and ruling spirit. He divided unto them his living. "To them"; that is, to both, not as so required by law, but as not wishing a slavish outward service without and against free will. God gives human freedom and choice their due place and operation in both man's sin, and man's recovery. The elder consented to the father's government, and hence his part remained under the father's charge as heretofore. The Pharisees honored the law, and kept up the forms of divine worship.

Verse 13.—Not many days after.—Speedily, showing impatience of restraint. Gathered all together. "All," as refusing to have anything to do with home and home rule. Took his journey.

The original here signifies the leaving of his own land. Into a far country. Showing how totally alien to God's will and heart is the life of sensuality, immorality, utter worldliness. Wasted his substance. Literally, scattered abroad; that is, dissipated, squandered. With riotous living. More exactly, living riotously. The word rendered "riotously," in its form of a noun, is used in Eph. v. 18; Titus i. 6; 1 Peter iv. 4, and is also further explained in vs. 30 by the older brother. By derivation it means unsafely; that is, ruinously.

Verse 14.—When he spent all, etc.—The "great famine" is added to the utter loss of his own resources to bring out the idea that neither in himself nor in his circumstances was there help or relief. Began to be in want. And to be aware of his want. The time has at length come when the sinner begins to wake to a sense of the need of that which he has not himself, and which comes not readily and freely to him in the "far country," away from God.

Verse 15.—Went and joined himself, etc.—At first he thinks to supply this need somehow where he is. No thought of a return. He will here work out for himself some kind and degree of satisfaction. Starvation faces him—anything for life. And even to tend the hogs is something. To a Jew this is extremity indeed. Lev. xi. 7, 8. To the Jew it would suggest the Gentile, by nature, an alien from the common wealth of Israel.

Verse 16.—He would fain, etc.—The "husks," or, rather, pods of the carob-tree, are horn-shaped (the Greek name means hornlets) six to ten inches long, and one broad, "containing a sweetish pulp, and several small brown shining seeds like beans," much used in the East as fodder for cattle, especially swine, and even eaten by the poorer classes. This verse by some is understood to mean that no man gave the prodigal any, even of these pods, and hence that he was compelled to steal them or starve; by others, that he was obliged, nay very glad, to eat of the pods, because "and," as often, introducing a reason he had no friend to give him aught else. "Would fain" is more exactly, "was very desirous," and so can fitly express the eagerness with which he either did eat, or would have eaten hog's fare. The first view makes his extremity the greater, and seems better to fit his words in verse 17. It makes his wretched service wholly unrewarded, while the other makes its reward a continued existence indeed, but in conscious degradation and misery.

Verse 17.—And [but] when he came to himself. Sin is a kind of insanity. We must distinguish between man's nature as constituted by God, and man's nature as perverted by himself. To come to one's self, is to come to one's God, or at least to get in position to come. Hired servants. Distinguished from the two classes of permanent servants mentioned, the one in vs. 22, and the other in vs. 26, as inferior to each, hence the very lowest. He thus contrasts his own starving condition with the plenty of the very lowest and meanest of the servants at home, to say nothing of a son's condition. He becomes conscious of his utter ruin where he is. Till then he has no thought of return.

Verse 18.—I will arise, etc.—Here is depicted only the working of the man's spirit. From the word "arise," we may fancy the man as having sat down in despair to die. This word, "my father," expresses not what he hopes the father again to become, but what he remembers him to have been, and so as what makes his own sin what it is. The sense of his sin as "against heaven," as well as "before" the father, was a sense of absolute, utterly inexcusable guilt.

Verse 19.—And are no more worthy, etc.—Not as though he would thus claim a servant's place, but as confessing what he is in contrast with what he might have been, owning thus the greatness of his sin, and so throwing himself wholly on the father's grace.

Verse 20.—When he was yet a great way off, etc.—A most vivid picture of God's readiness to receive sinners. Every clause of the verse, clause joined to clause, adds emphasis to the assertion of the freeness of Divine grace, and prepares for the contrast of the elder brother's, the Pharisaic, jealous hard-heartedness.

Verses 22-24.—The robe, ring, and shoes, were the recognized tokens of restored sonship; the feasting was the

full restored life of sonship. Behold, what God's mercy is, what it does.

I. The Downward Course.—(1.) The wish to be one's own. (2.) The departure from God's rule. (3.) The pleasures of sin. (4.) The miserable degradation.

II. The Return.—(1.) Memory and reflection. (2.) Self knowledge, including conviction of sin, and sense of ruin. (3.) Resolution to seek God and confess the sin, and the act inseparable from the resolution.

III. The Reception.—(1.) A cordial welcome. (2.) A restored sonship. (3.) A full forgiveness, and its fruits.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, October 27th, 1878. — The Rich Man and Lazarus.—Luke xvi. 19-31.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death."—Prov. xiv. 32.

The Story of the Bible Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS. The Prodigal Son.

Jesus tells us in this parable of a father and two sons: The younger son said, "Give me all the goods that belong to me." His father gave him his share; and soon after, he went to a far country. For a while he lived merrily; but by the time he had wasted all that he had, there came a great famine in the land, where he was. But he had spent all his money, and could get no food now that it was so dear. Where were now his gay friends who had feasted with him? They had left him alone, and he who had been a loved son in his father's house became the lowest servant. He was sent into the fields to feed the swine; there he was so hungry that he wanted to eat some of the husks he fed the pigs with. He thought how much worse was his miserable condition than that of the meanest servant in his father's house. Then he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." And he went to his father; perhaps his father would send him away, but he would try. But that loving father saw him while he was a great way off and ran out and fell on his neck and kissed him. The son could only cry, "Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And that father? Does he scold or punish him? His love and joy are so great that he can hardly do enough to show his full, free forgiveness. He called his servants, and told them to bring the best they had to clothe and feed him.

Youths' Department.

Mrs. Dart's Economy.

"I want to show you some undergarments I've been having made lately," said Mrs. Dart to her friend Mrs. Secor.

"Such exquisite sewing, and all hand-work, too, and I get them for next to nothing. Did you ever see anything finer than this ruffling and tucking?"

The ladies were in Mrs. Dart's sunny front chamber. It was in perfect order, and everything about it indicated the union of great taste with the possession of money. The furniture was costly, the carpets and rugs were rich, and the fluted pillowshams on the elegant bed, of the finest linen, edged with lace. As Mrs. Dart opened a drawer and took from it the newly-made clothing of which she had spoken, she went on to say,

"If your wardrobe needs replenishing, Jenny, now is your time. The woman who did these for me is desperately poor, and will be thankful to work at your own price. She offered to make these for twenty cents apiece. I would never thought of naming less than fifty to her myself, and I have paid eighty cents and a dollar to Miss Gilmore, for work less nicely done. But when she offered, I concluded she knew her own business best, and I jumped at the chance, I can tell you."

Mrs. Secor looked at the elegant dressing-sacques and other articles of clothing which her friend was proudly displaying. They were faultlessly done. But she uttered not a word for some moments, and the deepening flush on her cheeks and the light in her brown eyes told very plainly what she thought of her friend's

economy. Mrs. Dart, however, suspected nothing, and went on chatting fluently.

"Have you bought your new fall hat yet, Jenney? No! Then you must see mine. I found it at Hillyer's yesterday. Of course, I had to pay an immense price, for madame charges extra for her style; but that made no difference. I tell Lewis, when he finds fault, that if I spend at one end, I save at another, and he knows I never exceed the amount we have thought it right to limit ourselves to. This bonnet now cost twenty dollars; but there isn't a prettier one in our church, nor will there be this season."

"Twenty dollars, for a piece of French felt, a little velvet, a feather, and a cluster of autumn leaves! six would amply cover the actual cost of everything, Matilda, and you have willingly given the other fourteen—for what?"

"Why, you dear little goose, for the composition, the artistic combination, the effect. A woman's bonnet is the most important part of her dress; it is the head-piece and it must be handsome. I like elegant things anyway;" and the lady surveyed her dainty self in the mirror, and glanced complacently around her well-appointed room.

"Twenty dollars for the hat, and twenty cents for all the stitches that have gone into this elaborate sacque, tired stitches, too, I'm afraid, Matilda. How very, very hard the poor fingers had to toil for that poor twenty cents. It don't look like much, does it?"

As she spoke she took two silver dimes from her little steel purse, and held them thoughtfully in her hand.

"It was all the woman asked, dear," said Mrs. Dart positively. "If she had wanted more, would she not have said so? Surely she knew what she could afford to work for; I on my part, employed her really out of charity. I had no need of more things at present, and I let her do them only because the terms were so reasonable. She is a good sewer, and if I had been selfish, I would have kept her all to myself. Now, if you go and offer her more than she demands, Jenney Secor, you will do an unfriendly thing, and hurt her prospects, too, for I intend at once to send her Eddie's new shirt-waists to make, and when spring comes she shall have all of Adela's aprons and skirts, if she continues to please me."

"Where does she live?" asked Mrs. Secor.

"At No. 12 Harvard Street. It's a poky part of the city to go to. Lewis never likes me to venture into those tenement regions alone. But she'll be here to-night and I'll send her in to see you. I have no doubt she can embroider, and Cornelia might let her help on her trousseau. I am glad I told you about her."

"What did you say her name was?" said Mrs. Secor.

"I did not say it at all, but it is Ella MacBride. She has a little sister in the Home, and that's where I met her. Being a manager I see a good many poor people on Board days."

"Matilda, I am going to visit Ella MacBride, and find out for myself what sort of a home she lives in, and what sort of food she can buy at the price you tell me satisfies her. Will you accompany me? You are known as a benevolent woman, and you ought to make visits among the poor."

"I must beg to be excused, Mrs. Secor," said Mrs. Dart with decision. "I consented to give my name and influence to the Home, as my pastor asked me to do so; but I never intended to venture into places which are unfit for ladies, nor to engage in any Quixotic schemes. My duties lie mainly at home to my husband and children. If I please them and make them happy, my conscience is satisfied."

Harvard Street was fully a mile from the avenue on which the Darts and the Secors resided. Mrs. Secor was familiar with it, for her feet were accustomed to seeking the poor and sick in their homes. On leaving her friend she stopped a car which was going to the river, near which the thronged homes of Harvard Street were to be found. Homes! The name seems sadly mis-applied to houses in which hundreds of human beings are crowded closer than cattle, in which there is no privacy, no opportunity for the cultivation of delicacy, no room for thrift or good house-keeping to display itself. Once used as the residences of respectable merchants, the houses which Mrs. Secor came to had fallen from their

high estate. Years and years ago the former owners had moved up-town, the wave of fashion sending them far from a locality which had once been choice and aristocratic. By degrees they had sunken from the abodes of respectable mechanics and keepers of small shops, to the dwellings of the lowest laboring class whose precarious living is from hand to mouth. They had one advantage over the modern tenement-house, and one only. The halls were wide, the stairs were strong, and on smooth pine floor and ornate ceiling there was still the old stamp of gentility and thoroughness.

The door of No. 12 stood open. A dejected-looking man with a pipe in his mouth sat on the steps. A frowzy woman with her dress torn half off and a babe in her arms, was standing behind him, apparently scolding. She ceased the torrent of her objurgations as the pleasant-faced lady approached and inquired if the MacBrides lived there.

"Top floor, back room," was the brief reply.

Mrs. Secor picked her steps carefully through the hall and up the dirty stairs. She encountered half-naked children, clamorous and quarreling, nearly stumbled over a little fellow lying sound asleep in the highest passage, and was eyed suspiciously by a gaunt and savage-looking cat, who glared at her as she pushed him aside. Mrs. Secor disliked cats, but she pitied this one, for it seemed very forlorn.

Knocking at the specified door, a querulous voice bade her enter. Close to the small window sat a delicate-looking young woman, sewing with nervous haste. She scarcely glanced from her work, but left the task of entertaining to her mother, who was bending over the small stove as if to coax all the warmth she could from its feeble fire. The room was very bare but very clean, and the dress of both mother and daughter, though thin and old, was extremely neat. One evidence of refinement struck the quick eye of the visitor. A pot of mignonette in bloom stood on a shelf where the light could fall upon it, and its sweetness was lavished as generously in that poor abode as it could have been in the most palatial mansion.

"Miss MacBride," said Mrs. Secor, "you will excuse my intrusion when I tell you that I have come on a matter of business. I have seen the work you are doing for my friend Mrs. Dart, and I wish to engage you to sew for me. Can you operate on a machine?"

"I can," replied the girl, "but I have none of my own. I have never been able to get one."

"I should prefer your coming to my house. I will give you one dollar and a half per day, and for the present I shall need you four days every week. I think I may say that I will have work to employ you steadily for the next six weeks, for my niece is to be married, and there is a great deal of sewing to be done for her, and I have family work besides."

Such a gleam of joy as lighted up the pale face and flashed into the weary eyes! Such an immense thankfulness as for a moment altered its whole expression. Then she let her work fall on her lap and burst into tears. The mother spoke.

"Indeed, madam, you don't know how we've needed money. My little boy has a place in a store. He gets enough to pay the rent. Ella has walked the streets till her poor feet were blistered in her worn-out shoes looking for work, and nobody would give her any till your friend agreed to try her, and the price was so small that it has nearly killed her to work at it. But it was better far than the shops would give. Think of a dozen ladies' wrappers at twelve cents apiece and shirts at five cents each."

"The fine work she has been putting on these garments at twenty cents, amounted to more labor than that, Mrs. MacBride. It is not wise to make one's skill too cheap, for if you have real skill and merit, you are certain after a while to get properly remunerated. Mrs. Dart would have given more if your daughter had asked it."

"No, ma'am," emphatically said the daughter. "She took me only because I promised to make the things for so low a price. I had been to forty houses before I found one who would hire me. When am I to begin with you?"